

New therapy available in the North  
by Lloyd Robertson

I have advise for all of you northern women. If some man tells you that he loves you with all of his heart don't be too impressed. The heart is just a fist sized muscle that pumps blood. But, if he tells you that he loves you with all his amygdala, take notice, this is an unusual man.

The amygdala is that part of our brain that governs our feelings. It acts like a kind of thermostat that takes input from our senses and delivers an emotion. And it's fast. If there was a bear in your living room you would start emoting even before the image of a bear registered on your neocortex or thinking part of your brain.

Most common mental health problems like depression, anxiety disorder, phobias, chronic anger, low self-esteem, attachment disorder and post traumatic stress are problems of a malfunctioning amygdala. Psychologists will commonly attempt to teach the neocortex to ride herd on a wild amygdala. In other words, our thinking can control our feeling. This is often not easy. It is hard to keep having positive thoughts when it feels as tho the world is going to end. Recognizing this, psychiatrists will often try to medicate an errant amygdala into submission.

Now a new therapy is available that appears to affect the amygdala directly without the side effects associated with drug therapy. And it is much faster than cognitive therapies. I have noticed impressive results with many of my clients within three to five sessions.

Not even the founder of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Dr. Francine Shappero, is sure how it works, exactly. But in 1987 she noticed that eye movements can reduce the effects of disturbing thoughts. The method she pioneered replicates the eye movements often present while we dream. Current research suggests that we dream in order to reprocess emotions that remain in our systems from the previous day. In other words, dreaming is a natural way of resetting our amygdalas.

Some times the reprocessing our brains need in order to maintain our emotional health is incomplete. Trauma, abuse or even merely upsetting experiences in childhood may become "frozen in time" with the experience just as painful as when it first occurred and with our amygdalas reacting accordingly. Even when we choose to repress the painful memories the underlying lessons learned by the amygdala remain and it reacts accordingly. EMDR appears to focus in on those painful memories removing underlying emotional blockages in the process. The memories remain but without the emotional trauma formerly associated with those memories. The client gains a new perspective and places new meaning on whatever events had been affecting him or her. All of this comes from within the individual. Unlike hypnosis, there is no power of suggestion coming from the outside.

The method is not painless. Sessions often come complete with tears. But clients who continue thru their tears often report the most progress. Frequently they say it is as tho something was lifted from their shoulders and that they are not exactly sure what it was. The memories remain but the feeling is different.

The EMDR International Institute only trains people qualified to practice psychotherapy. It is not a "miracle cure" meant to be used in all situations. It is another tool in a psychologist's "bag of tricks" to be used in appropriate settings. It is important that any person commencing EMDR only do so with an accredited therapist.