

The EMDR Resourcing Process Explained

Dr. Scott Giacomucci, DSW, LCSW, CTTS, CET III, PAT

EMDR Defined:

Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is one of the most researched and highly recommended treatment approaches for trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The EMDR process desensitizes disturbing images and changes our relationship to the traumatic memory by accessing the brain's innate capacity to reprocess memory. EMDR works by promoting integration on multiple levels - including the right/left hemispheres of the brain; past, present, and future integration; and an integration of adaptive information with the 'stuck traumatic memory'. Many experience significant changes after just a few EMDR processing sessions.

EMDR Resourcing Explained:

Before beginning the traumatic memory processing stage of EMDR, we engage in a preparatory process called "EMDR Resourcing". This process is about accessing internal resources, strengths, and positive memories – basically to tap into the goodness in your life. In EMDR resourcing, we use some form of slow bilateral stimulation (back and forth tapping, vibration, eye movements, and/or sound) which helps to engage and soothe the nervous system while strengthen the memory or resource being activated. EMDR Resourcing is almost always described by clients as "calming", "peaceful", "relaxing", "enlightening", and even "fun". In the resourcing process, we do not bring up the trauma, this comes later in the EMDR process.

There are an unlimited number of potential resources that could be used in this process, but generally we offer five commonly helpful resources – a safe place, nurturing figure, protective figure, an animal, and a container. Your EMDR therapist will walk you through each resource, helping you to find resources that do not have mixed feelings. Once a specific resource is agreed upon, your therapist will guide you in using your imagination to tap into a positive experience with this resource with some form of bilateral stimulation. For example, imagining being in the safe place right now or being nurtured by a loving figure. In this process, it helps to notice all of the sensory data related to the resource – the sound of the waves on the beach, the smell of the ocean, the taste of the air, the sensation of the wind, sun, and sand, the related images, and the emotional feeling of being at the beach. In the same way that remembering (or imagining) negative/traumatic events impacts how we feel, remembering (or imagining) positive experiences also impacts how we feel in the present moment.

Most clients will experience a notable change in emotions and physical sensations after just a minute or so of imagining being with a resource. Many symptoms of PTSD are related to the nervous system responding to a past trauma as if it were happening right now. Because the nervous system can't always differentiate between a dream, a memory, a real-time experience, or an imagined experience, we can use positive resources to regulate our emotions and reduce the impact of trauma on our life today. These are resources that you will practice with your therapist and then use on your own in-between sessions to help cope with difficult feelings or experiences. Anyone can benefit from the EMDR resourcing experience (all clients, staff, therapists, etc.) as it helps to empower us through positive

imagination and memory. Some may not be ready or clinically appropriate to participate in EMDR processing, but EMDR resourcing can be a helpful process in itself.

Individual Resources Further Explained:

As noted previously, the five common resources used in EMDR Resourcing are the safe place, nurturing figure, protective figure, animal, and container. Each of these resources is carefully selected with an emphasis on safety, nurturing, protection, connection, and containment – all of which are important elements for trauma recovery. Other common resources include one's adult self, a supportive group/community, wisdom figures, or spiritual resources.

The **Safe Place** resource could be a favorite place in nature (hiking path, beach, mountain, etc.), a place with positive memories, a place from a movie, story, or even a completely imagined place. All that matters is that this is a place where you can feel safe, at ease, relaxed, and at peace. Because relationships often have mixed feelings, it is generally best if this safe place resource is a place of solitude, imagined without others present – a personal sanctuary of safety.

The **Nurturing and Protective Figures** could be real relationships in your life where you feel cared for, protected, safe, and loved. Again, it is important that we choose resources without mixed feelings and figures unassociated with loss or trauma. Due to the often relational nature of trauma, it is often necessary to choose nurturing or protective figures that are archetypal, role-models from pop culture, superheroes, angels, spiritual/religious figures, or characters from legends, movies, or books.

The **Animal Resource** is also helpful due to the relational aspect of trauma. Our animals are often the best examples of unconditional love and instinctual protection. Connecting with an animal resource can be an immediate way to access positive feelings of love, joy, and comfort. This animal figure could be a pet (it is best not to use a deceased pet), an animal from the zoo, or even a fantasy animal (dragon, unicorn, phoenix, etc.). For some, the animal resource has a spiritual or shamanic experience to it.

The **Container resource** is about developing a symbol of containment for difficult memories, feelings, sensations, thoughts, or addiction cravings. Many choose containers such as a safe, a wooden chest, or a sealed box of some sort. This resource is used to visualize physically putting anything negative or difficult into the container. The simple process of imagining putting a flashback or negative belief into the container often provides one with a sense of power and control over the PTSD symptoms that were previously overpowering and uncontrollable. The function of this resource is not to repress or avoid, but to safely contain difficult material so that it can be addressed later.

Conclusion:

All of these resources are useful on their own for emotional regulation and coping with the aftermath of trauma. These resources empower one to take back control of their inner experience. For many, the resourcing process is a “corrective emotional experience” which in itself helps to reverse the impact of traumatic experience. Furthermore, if needed, these resources can be integrated into the EMDR processing phase in the future to help renegotiate traumatic memories and images.

For more information on EMDR or to find an EMDR therapist, please visit www.EMDRIA.org