

E.M.D.R. and Anxiety

Q.

My teenage son has had E.M.D.R. therapy for anxiety attacks that were very limiting in his ability to progress (go for job interviews, attend college classes that were intimidating to him). After a period of time here he seemed to improve, he stopped going to therapy and said he felt only life experiences would help him overcome some of his anxieties. After not seeing a therapist for a year, he told me today that he thought he needed to return. Is this a common result? Are patients ever “cured” through E.M.D.R. therapy, or will some patients need recurrent therapy throughout their lives?

monkeyboy, Kansas

Dr. Shapiro responds:

I believe the problem here is that your son terminated therapy prematurely. Some clients stop because they feel better and then want to do the rest on their own. However, the full protocol for E.M.D.R. treatment involves (1) processing the memories that set the foundation for the problem, (2) processing the current situations that trigger disturbance and (3) incorporating the experiences into the memory networks that are necessary to overcome skill or developmental deficits.

With longstanding anxieties, this would involve venturing out and noticing any new anxieties that arise. These would be addressed with further processing, since some anxiety responses are not revealed within the confines of the therapy session alone. For stable treatment effects, your son should address his various anxiety issues using this full application of E.M.D.R. therapy.

Read more from Dr. Shapiro on EMDR at: http://consults.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/16/expert-answers-on-e-m-d-r/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0

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