

Peak Performance and E.M.D.R.

Q.Dr. Shapiro, you wrote that your book "[Getting Past Your Past](#)" includes techniques "taught to Olympic athletes to achieve peak performance. These can also help people prepare for challenges like presentations, job interviews and social situations." What's the relationship between sports performance and job interviews or social situations, and what does it have to do with E.M.D.R. therapy? *Ernest K, Denver*

Dr. Shapiro responds:

People seek therapy for a variety of reasons, but in general the reasons can be summarized as being "stuck" and prevented from acting in ways that are healthy and adaptive. E.M.D.R. therapy is used to process the memories of experiences that set the foundation for the problems, process the current situations that cause disturbance and trigger negative behaviors, and incorporate the skills needed to achieve positive outcomes in the future.

For those interested in achieving "peak performance" in sports, the person's history is examined to identify what memories may be blocking them from achieving their goals. Often this turns out to be previous failures, injuries and negative comments by coaches or peers. These memories remained stored in the brain with the negative emotions, beliefs and body reactions that occurred at the time of the event. For instance, as I describe in "Getting Past Your Past":

Kyle was a top state-ranked high school athlete who came to therapy to work on his lack of confidence and motivation. He processed memories of injuries and distractions such as imposing opponents, parental comments and disappointing looks on his coach's face. A number of techniques [in the book] were used to help him stay focused on the game. Upon graduation, Kyle received a scholarship to attend a prominent university as part of their NCAA Division I highly ranked team. As he said, "This doesn't just help with my sport, does it? I'm getting straight A's for the first time!" He'd attended an academically challenging parochial school and had been struggling with learning disabilities.

Some of the techniques taught in the book involve ways to achieve a state of calm and confidence. Many people mistakenly believe that it is important to feel anxious in order to perform well. However, performance research demonstrates that while "arousal" is involved, the way we deal with the arousal makes the difference between success and failure. Therefore, performers, executives and athletes are taught ways to achieve optimal emotional and physical states. In addition, E.M.D.R. therapy incorporates "positive memory templates" that set the stage for positive performance in the future. A survey of Olympic athletes and coaches reported that 90 percent of the athletes and 94 percent of the coaches incorporated these kinds of imagery techniques into their training programs.

So whether your desired "peak performance" involves athletics, executive functioning, social interactions or optimizing a job interview and social interactions, you can utilize these techniques to prepare yourself to do your best.

Read more from Dr. Shapiro about 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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