

Brainspotting – an Effective Therapy

Brainspotting is based on a discovery by EMDR trainer and therapist David Grand, Ph.D. Brainspotting developed out of his EMDR practice and has proven to be a powerful additional therapy tool for the treatment of trauma.

Brainspotting functions as a neurobiological tool to support the clinical healing relationship between the therapist and client. There is no replacement for a mature, nurturing therapeutic presence and the ability to engage with another suffering human in a safe and trusting relationship where they feel heard, accepted, and understood.

Together with this clinical relationship, Brainspotting gives us a tool to help locate, focus on, process, and release experiences and symptoms that are typically out of reach of the conscious mind and its cognitive and language capacity. Brainspotting works with the deep brain and the body through its direct access to the autonomic and limbic systems within the body's central nervous system. A 'Brainspot' is the eye position which is connected to the location of an emotionally charged issue stored within the brain, most likely in the amygdala, the hippocampus, or the orbitofrontal cortex of the limbic system.

When a Brainspot is stimulated, the deep brain reflexively signals to the therapist that an area of significance has been located. This typically happens out of the client's conscious awareness. There are a multitude of reflexive responses, including eye twitches, wobbles, freezes, blinks (hard and double blinks) pupil dilation and constriction, narrowing, facial tics, brow furrowing, sniffs, swallows, yawns, coughs, head nods, hand signals, foot movement and body shifting.

The appearance of a reflexive response is an indication that a Brainspot has been located and activated. The Brainspot can then be accessed and stimulated by holding the client's eye position while the client is focused on the somatic/sensory experience of the symptom or problem being addressed in the therapy.

The maintenance of that eye position/Brainspot combined with the attentional focus on the body's 'felt sense' of that issue or trauma, stimulates a deep integrating and healing process within the brain. This processing, which appears to take place at a reflexive or cellular level within the nervous system, brings about a de-conditioning of previously conditioned, maladaptive emotional and physiological responses. Brainspotting appears to stimulate, focus on, and activate the body's inherent capacity to heal itself from trauma.

Brainspotting is also very useful to access and develop internal resource states and experiences. These resources allow the therapist and patient, where necessary, to 'pendulate' between resource or positive states and trauma states during Brainspotting to enable more gradual, graded processing and desensitization of intensely traumatic and emotionally charged issues and symptoms.

The accumulated effect of life events

Any life event which causes significant physical and/or emotional injury and distress, in which the person powerfully experiences being overwhelmed, helpless, or trapped, can become a traumatic experience.

There is growing recognition within the healing professions that experiences of physical and/or emotional injury, acute and chronic pain, serious physical illness, dealing with difficult medical interventions, societal turmoil, environmental disaster, as well as many other problematic life events, will contribute to the development of a substantial reservoir of life trauma. That trauma is held in the body.

In most cases, the traumatized individual does not usually have the opportunity or the support to adequately process and integrate these traumatic life events. The traumatic experience then becomes a part of that individual's trauma reservoir. The body and the psyche cannot remain unaffected by the physical, energetic and emotional costs extracted by this accumulated trauma load. The medical and psychological literature now acknowledges that approximately 75% of requests for medical care are linked to the actions or consequences of this accumulation of stress and/or trauma upon the systems of the human body.

Every health care professional encounters treatment situations in which physical symptoms cannot be separated from their emotional or psychological correlates. Traumatic life experiences, whether physical or emotional, are often significant contributing factors in the development and/or maintenance of most of the symptoms and problems encountered in health care.

Conclusion - Brainspotting provides a neurobiological tool for accessing, diagnosing, and treating a wide range of somatic and emotionally-based conditions.