

## What Is Attachment Focused (AF-)EMDR?

Within each of us is a hidden potential, a wellspring of untapped natural resources we can use to heal our psychological wounds and help us better navigate challenges we face in our lives. The problem is that these resources too often remain buried, and we don't know how to access them. When we experience trauma our information processing system is disrupted. The information is left in fragmented form, unprocessed, and not stored in long-term memory. The unintegrated fragments often cause symptoms that disrupt our lives. A sound or even a smell that reminds you of the trauma can elicit a full-blown panic response. Unprocessed traumas can cause us to feel anxious and depressed and to have nightmares and trouble sleeping. Instead of feeling like the trauma happened in the past, it feels like it is alive in the present.

AF-EMDR was developed by Dr. Laurel Parnell. Dr. Parnell is a licensed clinical psychologist and a leading expert in the field of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). She is the author of several books on EMDR and is widely recognized for her contributions to and development of Attachment Focused (AF-)EMDR theory. Dr. Parnell has trained many therapists worldwide in the use of AF-EMDR, and her approach has been widely praised for its effectiveness in helping individuals heal from attachment trauma, anxiety, depression, and a wide range of other mental health issues.

Attachment-focused EMDR (AF-EMDR) is client-centered and emphasizes a reparative therapeutic relationship using a combination of (1) Resource Tapping™ (Parnell, 2008) to strengthen clients and repair developmental deficits, (2) EMDR to process traumas, and (3) talk therapy to help integrate the information from EMDR sessions and to provide the healing derived from therapist-client interaction.

AF-EMDR extends the use and benefits of EMDR and bilateral stimulation for use with clients who have been typically less responsive to traditional EMDR protocols, due to acute or chronic relational trauma and attachment deficits. Those deficits include the effects of childhood physical or sexual abuse, neglect, early losses, birth trauma, medical trauma, parental drug or alcohol abuse, caregiver misattunement, secondary trauma, and the cumulative effects of all.

### Terms often used in (AF-)EMDR:

- **Bilateral Stimulation** is the use of eye movements, tactile sensations, sounds or physical movements to stimulate the left and right hemispheres, or sides, of the brain. Bilateral stimulation is used to activate and integrate information from these two hemispheres.
- **Resources** are inherent qualities such as love, wisdom, strength and joy, as well as memories, experiences, mental images, or people to whom we can connect. Resources reside within us.
- **Activation** means bringing a resource into consciousness through your imagination so that all of your senses are alive and its qualities are available to you.
- **Tapping** means using the hands to alternately tap (right-left, right-left) on the knees, legs or shoulders in order to achieve bilateral stimulation. Other methods include alternately tapping your feet on the floor or simply tapping any surface with your fingers.