



# **EMDIR: Modified Integrative EMDR**

## ***Position Paper***

### **Background**

Since the tragic events of Oct 7, 2023, the State of Israel has been thrust into a whirlwind of stress, anxiety and trauma. This crisis situation affects our population at all levels. Beginning with the most obvious stress of battle that our soldiers face in their relentless heroic efforts to protect their homeland, they have witnessed the horrors of a war that was thrust upon us by the evil of Hamas. The intensity of battle, the deforming disabling injuries on the field, killing of civilians, the heroic efforts to defend and then tragically witness loss of life and claiming the dead, are all taking a devastating toll on our *Chayalim* (Soldiers) and *Miluimnikim* (Army Reserves), their families, as well as the country as a whole.

Being a small country, most of Israel has been adversely affected by this war. Our brave and valiant warriors consist of young soldiers as well as the hundreds of thousands of reserve soldiers who leave their jobs, wives, children and community to protect the country. We are looking at the trauma of war, of lost income, unstable home life and much more. Our families at home are struggling to maintain normal lives under constant stress and anxiety. We are seeing young widows having to deal with sudden loss of their spouses, along with the income and emotional support that they had come to rely on, and parents who have to bury their young sons as they had entered the prime of their lives. Our country is also accommodating displaced families from both the north and south who are attempting to maintain a normal life in hotels, makeshift schools and modified work situations. The sum total is a massive and critical need for professional treatment, emotional support and trauma care.

## **The Critical Need**

The need for an urgent, accelerated effort to provide critical treatment is readily apparent. Current resources are overwhelmed and cannot possibly meet the enormous demand for services. HaMetaplim (The Therapists) was created as a volunteer organization to meet this urgent need by organizing teams of psychologists, psychotherapists, and somatic therapists (i.e. physical therapists, massage therapists, and craniosacral therapists) to provide psychological and physical relief to our soldiers coming out of Gaza and on the border with Lebanon. What has become apparent is that the amount of PTSD that is being experienced is staggering and as a result, the organizers of HaMetaplim (The Therapists) have created EMDIR to provide a modified integrative training for EMDR for mental health professionals, and EMDR-derived stabilization techniques for somatic therapists.

## **What is EMDR**

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is universally accepted and well-established as an evidence-based, gold-standard form of trauma intervention. It provides immediate relief from trauma symptoms through bilateral stimulation of the eyes or other areas of the body that actually can move the trauma out of the limbic system that is predominant in the left hemisphere of the brain and into the right hemisphere, where the processing centers of the brain are located. It allows for desensitization of the intensity of the emotions, detachment from images of the experience, and reprocessing of maladaptive thoughts and schema that emanate from the trauma. It also allows for the resolution of physical symptoms that result from the somatic memory of trauma that is stored in the body. For those who have experienced EMDR, it is truly a gift of relief and hope for healing. It is well known that early intervention after trauma can effectively reduce the probability of long term PTSD symptoms. This is why having a more widespread effort to train more therapists in this invaluable treatment modality is essential, especially during this prolonged traumatic event that is currently occurring in Israel.

## **Training for EMDR**

There is a standard training for EMDR that is provided by the EMDR Institute in California, using a protocol that has been adapted for training in other countries, including Israel. However, to date, there is not a sufficient number of EMDR trained therapists in Israel. To meet the need for an immediate response, a modified approach that is both time and cost-efficient, with an enhanced therapist and client-friendly approach is clearly warranted and critically needed.

Many papers have been written about offering modified forms of EMDR to mental health professionals to meet the unique situations in which they find themselves. The Recent-Traumatic Episode (R-TEP) protocol developed by Ilan Shapiro and the EMDR-PRECI protocol for ongoing traumatic incidents developed by Ignacio Jarero are two examples of modifications of the original EMDR protocol to be used in specific, unique instances. There are also other examples of training of “low-intensity” EMDR-derived techniques to less trained, non-mental health professionals to help meet the needs of a crisis. Examples include the Flash Technique developed by Phillip Mansfield and the ASSYST-I protocol, also developed by Ignacio Jarred, which focuses exclusively on calming and regulating the client’s nervous system, which will be adapted in the EMDIR training. EMDIR trained somatic-based therapists will be equipped to enable large numbers of trauma victims to self-regulate and relax their traumatized bodies. This is an example of what the literature describes as “scalable” approaches to trauma treatment, which involves larger numbers of trauma victims, and using paraprofessionals to utilize more simplified EMDR-derived techniques to reduce nervous system intensity and reactivity.

In Israel, there are over 2500 volunteer therapists, including psychologists and psychotherapists, as well as somatic-based therapists including physical therapists, chiropractors, osteopaths, massage therapists, reflexologists, and cranial-sacral therapists that are part of the “HaMetaplim” (The Therapists) group. Many want to respond to this crisis but lack the necessary trauma-informed clinical skills, especially utilizing EMDR. EMDIR has amongst its volunteers, Dr. Norman Goldwasser, a licensed clinical psychologist from Miami, with close to 30 years of specialized EMDR training and experience, has designed a modified EMDR

training program to help meet the overwhelming need for trauma treatment of the Israeli population, with special emphasis on working with military personnel, their families and members of bereaved families. He has trained psychologists at the new Trauma Center at Shalvata Hospital, and a group of therapists from “HaMetaplim” (The Therapists) group, all of whom reported that their training was highly effective, thorough, and well-worth the effort to attend (see testimonials below).

## **EMDIR Training**

Dr. Goldwasser is offering a Basic Level of training for those with little or no exposure to EMDR, and an Advanced Training (Advanced Speciality Workshop) for those who have completed the Basic Level training. In the Basic Training, mental health professionals will receive training with regards to the different types of trauma, the neurobiology of trauma, the biological mechanics of memory, the Adaptive Information Processing model, the science behind EMDR, and a comprehensive protocol for EMDR that is modified to be more sequentially valid and user-friendly. Use of the Theratapper and self-tapping that enhances a patient’s ability to regulate bilateral stimulation will be demonstrated. Supervised practice sessions will be provided with ample time for questions and discussion.

The Advanced Training (Advanced Speciality Workshop) will include ample time for feedback about trainees experiences with EMDR, including challenges and success stories. Specific training regarding the plethora of research that demonstrates the efficacy of the EMDR will also be included. More specifically, critical and relevant issues pertaining to the situation in Israel will be discussed, along with protocols for treatment. These include the grief of soldiers and families for sudden loss, resilience training, IFS (Internal family systems therapy)/parts work, suicide prevention, dealing with moral injury/guilt, reintegration upon returning from battle, Post-Traumatic Growth, possibilities for Group EMDR, and Self-EMDR for emotional self-regulation. Finally, the therapists will have an in-depth training by Susan Belitsky, a highly trained psychotherapist, on the mind-body connection, physiological manifestations of trauma and stress, and learn about the various somatic-based therapies that can be integrated as a team to

deal with the effects of PTSD. This forms the basis of the integrative model of EMDIR.

In addition to the basics of EMDR, the somatic-based therapists will also have an in-depth training by Phyllis Krug, a doctoral level physical therapist with extensive training and experience in mind-body therapies, about the physiological response of the body to trauma, and develop a better understanding of the physical and emotional response to the challenges of war. They will then learn methods of body regulation from EMDR as well as assessment of somatically stored trauma, as well as a variety of physical interventions to help sooth and down-regulate the body. These are critical skills that are badly needed when dealing with soldiers coming out of direct battle and life-threatening situations.

## **Conclusion**

There is clearly a critical need for a more robust, accelerated response to the ever increasing need for trauma treatment in Israel. As the war rages on, acts of terrorism increase exponentially and the scourge of anti-semitism and betrayal explodes across the world, we have become a traumatized nation. EMDIR is an opportunity to work together to meet the ever increasing challenges that we are facing today, and those that will undoubtedly continue into the future. EMDIR is trying to do its part by attempting to help meet this need through training a large number of professionals to be better equipped to deal with the devastating emotional, mental, and physical injuries that our people are experiencing. The ultimate goal of this training is to inspire and encourage trainees to pursue further formal training through EMDR Israel.

We at EMDIR are sensitive to the concerns of maintaining professional responsibility and integrity, and to follow the adage of “Do No Harm”. We are dedicated to assure that all recipients of our care will benefit from interventions to calm the mind, body, and soul, and to be better able to transition to a place of calmness, hope, and healing.