

Brainspotting Therapy Helped Me Find My Blind Spots—and Face Them Head-On

BY WOLF TERRY

I sat cross-legged on my therapist's couch, just like every other Friday afternoon, except this time she sat on the couch next to me. After years of talk therapy to cope with PTSD, I was trying something different—a supposed fast track to fully overcoming lifelong somatic trauma. I was a little nervous but also ready to heal. To prepare for the session, I had read *Brainspotting: The Revolutionary New Therapy for Rapid and Effective Change* by psychotherapist David Grand, a recommendation from my own therapist.

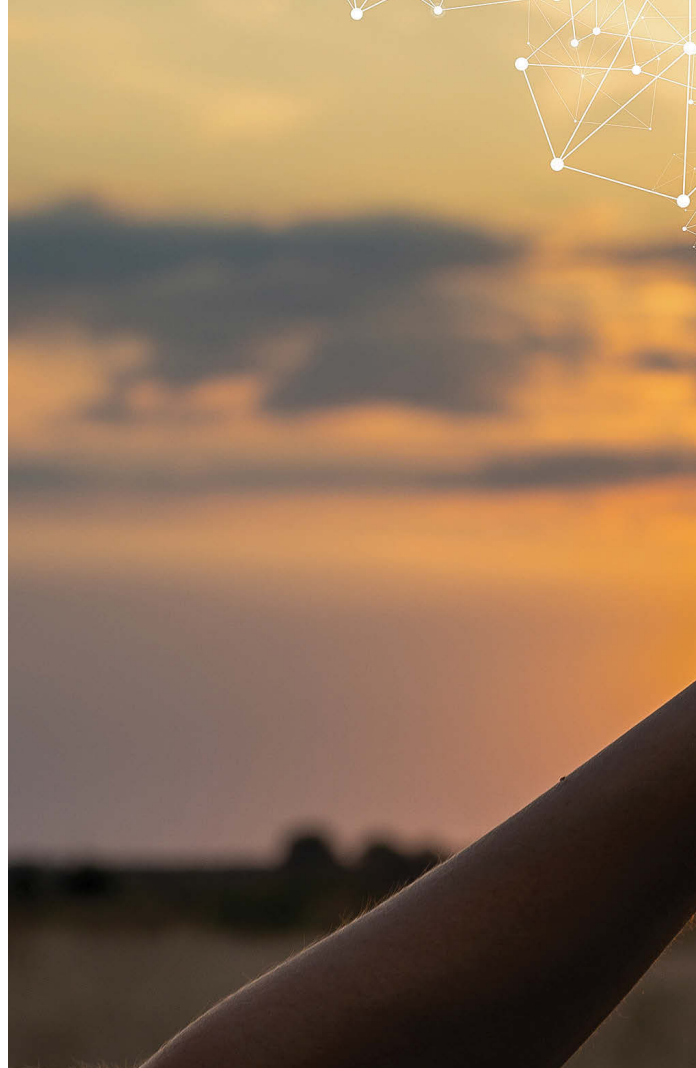
Brainspotting is similar to Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)—the go-to technique for trauma therapy. The techniques fuse sight, sound, and traditional talk therapy to trigger, discover, and safely resolve trauma. EMDR functions on the underlying principle that where you look with your eyes can affect how you feel. The therapist asks the patient to look at different focal points while recalling emotionally provocative memories. The visual distraction helps the patient create new associations to long-standing painful experiences.

Grand found that he could use a singular focal point, or Brainspot, to consistently drive his clients into the deepest corners of their memories and resolve any attached unprocessed trauma. Now, more than 13,000 therapists worldwide trained in Brainspotting observe and guide clients using this method. By combining EMDR, BioLateral Sound (a term coined by Grand that describes soothing nature sounds or music that engages both hemispheres of the brain to create a trancelike state), and physical observations (for example, “My chest feels tight”), Brainspotting cultivates what Grand calls focused mindfulness—mindfulness that occurs through activation of a specific issue or memory. The process helps us reconnect with memories that our brain dodges to protect us from further pain.

After devouring Grand's book, I was so eager to give it a go that I pushed my regularly scheduled therapy session forward.

The couch in my therapist's office was the same familiar green velvet one, but with my therapist sitting two cushions away, it felt different. She held an extendable pointer as I put on headphones and adjusted the volume so that I could still hear her voice. A beautiful combination of babbling brook and instrumental guitar moved from my right ear to my left. With the BioLateral Sound established, she slowly moved the pointer across my field of vision, looking for a physical response (an eye blink, a shift in facial expression) in order to locate the Brainspot. She stopped and extended the pointer, up and down, until together we located a focal point that caused a tightness in my chest and shoulders, a trigger that would allow me to access a deep memory I had no recollection of.

Almost as soon as we found my Brainspot, everything blurred except for the tip of the pointer, which was hugged by a bubble of iridescent light. I could feel a memory emerging, less like a vision, more like a nudge in the back of my skull. I was a kid again, alone at night on the floor of my mother's friend's living room, feigning sleep so a drunk man wouldn't bother me. (I used to have to couch-surf





in order to go to elementary and middle school in the fall while my parents remained in the backwoods, running their business.) I could hear my therapist ask what I was experiencing. “He’s mean,” I told her. “I’m trying to fall asleep, but I don’t feel good around him. I just want to go home and be safe.”

My face grew hot, but I held my gaze effortlessly. My brain refused to release my eyes from this spot. I would later learn that this was because my nervous system needed to fully live out this unresolved trauma in order to come back to stasis and find resolution. Though I hadn’t known it, my body had been stuck in that room for 20-some years, caught in a heightened fight-or-flight state. In order to descend out of it, I had to complete the cycle through reliving it, finally relieving myself and my body of that experience for good.

After a few more moments of processing the memory, a new wave rushed through me. My therapist intuitively moved the pointer to another spot, this time to the left. She stopped and asked how my body felt. It was light as a feather, but also heavy and sinking. She instructed me to focus more clearly on the wall behind the pointer, then bring my focus back to its tip, a method called Convergence Brainspotting. It’s a cool-down exercise that leads to rapid deep processing by activating the oculocardiac reflex (OCR), a powerful, immediate parasympathetic reflex that changes our subconscious relationship to past trauma in a matter of minutes. As Grand details, any change in how or

where we look when in this state of focused mindfulness alters our brain state and pushes the healing process ahead through stimulation of the vagus nerve, which runs from the brain directly down to the heart and the stomach. Once the vagus nerve is engaged, it sends an immediate signal to slow down the heart and relax the body. When Convergence Brainspotting is used to access and clear a memory, the whole body responds and relates this state of calm to the memory, acknowledging that we are safe and the event is no longer a threat.

I felt like I had suddenly been relieved of a big burden, as though a tight knot in my brain were being released. Colors became more vivid; my skin tingled.

After talking about what had transpired and doing a closed-eye grounding meditation, the session came to a close, and as I walked back to my car, I shrugged off a vague feeling that something major had just happened. That night, I fell asleep with ease for the first time in nearly two decades, having struggled with insomnia for two-thirds of my life. After a single Brainspotting session, I had finally found some reprieve.

I’ve continued Brainspotting therapy for the past year, and while sleep still evades me from time to time, I’ve been able to uncover and resolve other traumatic memories, including some long-term PTSD. Before accessing this modality, I couldn’t see an end to my internal suffering. Now I know exactly where to look to find freedom. 🌸

Copyright of Yoga Journal is the property of Pocket Outdoor Media and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.