

EMDR for children and adults with Intellectual Disabilities

EMDR

Child and Youth

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MEVISSSEN PSYCHOTRAUMA

Intellectual disabilities _ Impaired functioning

More severe intellectual disabilities:
IQ ≤ 50 (6 out of 1000 persons)

(Moderate, Severe, Profound ID)

Dependent on others

Mild Intellectual Disabilities:
IQ 51-70 (1 out of 100 persons)

Borderline Intellectual Functioning:
IQ 71-85 (6 à 7:100)

Practical skills

(personal care,
housekeeping tasks,
using public transport...)

Conceptual skills

(reading,
writing,
counting...)

Social skills

(communicate,
empathize,
solving social
problems...)



High risk for posttraumatic stress

- More frequent exposure to traumatic & stressful events
- More problems to process events
- They are 2 to 6 times more likely to develop PTSD
- For a very long time PTSD was unknown by professionals

Rare genetic syndroms

2009 in Trouw, a Dutch newspaper



Nina (staand) en Lindsay zoeken steun bij elkaar. Zij hebben beiden het Marshall Smith-syndroom. Rechts de stiefvader van Lindsay. (FOTO INGE VAN MILL)

Nina (standing) and Lindsay find comfort in each other. They both have Marshall Smith syndrome. On the right is Lindsay's stepfather.

Marshall-Smith syndrome (worldwide 50)

- growth and feeding difficulties
- abnormal bone maturation
- breathing difficulties
- intellectual and motor developmental delays
- unusual facial features
- bone fractures occurring without a clear cause

Case, 5years old, SID, rare genetic syndrom

Fear of medical examinations and treatments

Medical trauma or due to SID??

- Storytelling in usual way

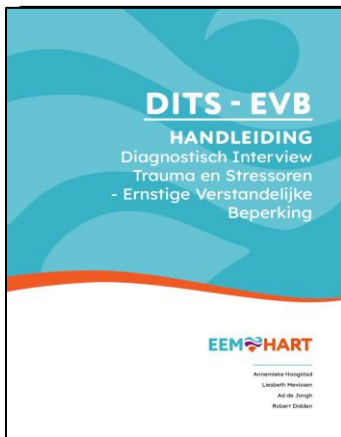
Stories:

Tube-fed shortly after birth and put under anesthesia (the surgical cap)

Painful examination of his ears by an ENT specialist

Dental check-ups

Video fragment before and after EMDR storytelling



DITS-SID

NEW!!

PTSD clinical interview

Diagnostic Interview Trauma & Stressors-Severe Intellectual Disabilities (Hoogstad, Mevissen, de Jongh, & Didden, in press)

Informants: relatives and caregivers

Training required

Online available soon

Also in English!

Info: a.hoogstad@eemhart.nl



Hoogstadt et al., 2026
Validation study(N=106)

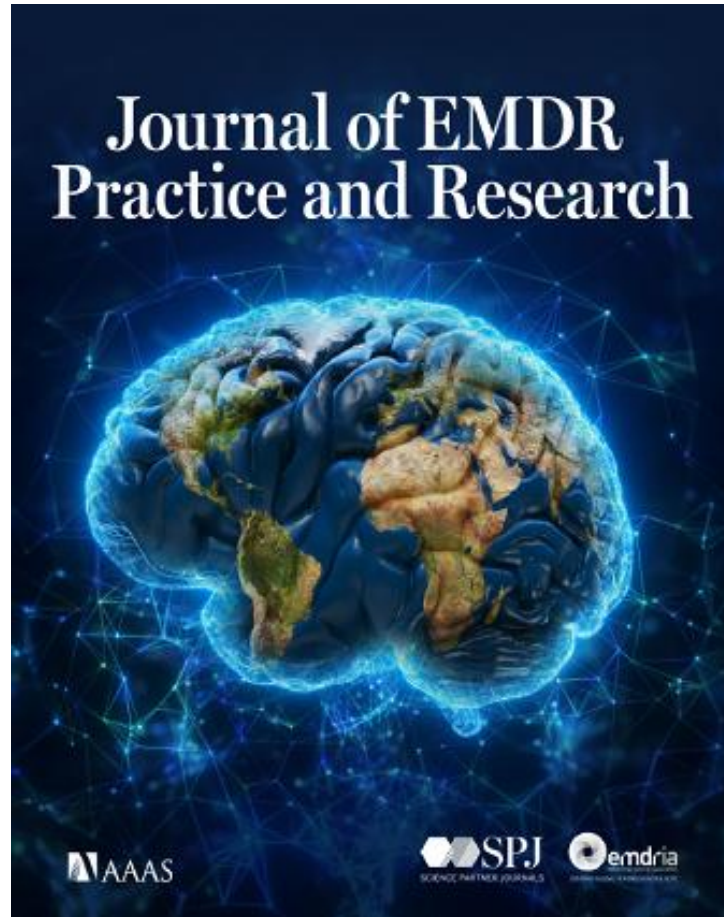
- Most frequently mentioned **trauma's and stressors:**
medical issues, death or serious injury of another person ,
physical hurt, sexual abuse
- Overall PTSD manifests in the same way as in young children,
primarily behavioral
- PTSD 13%–19% (7% in normal population)
- All PTSD diagnoses were missed before

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EMDR storytelling in adults with severe ID and PTSD

(Hoogstad, Mevissen, & Didden, 2024; Hoogstad, Bouwmeester, Mevissen, & Didden, in press)



Multiple Baseline Experimental Design
(N=3 resp. N=7)

- PTSD symptoms ↓
- challenging behaviors ↓ (mixed results)
- (most) dysfunctional behaviors ↓

→ EMDR Storytelling is safe, feasible and potentially effective

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Case 2



child&youth



parents&caregivers



adults

Diagnostic Interview Trauma & Stressors-
Mild Intellectual Disabilities (Mevissen,
Didden & de Jongh, 2018)

PTSD clinical interview (in Dutch only 🙄)



Versluis et al., 2025
N=97 adults, MID-BIF, supported housing

PTSD underdiagnosed (diagnostic overshadowing)

58% classified with PTSD (DITS-ID-adults) _only 7% had been diagnosed before

Most frequently mentioned type A trauma

sexual abuse, physical abuse, witnessing violence,
accident or fire



EMDR in children and adults with MID-BIF

- Applicable, safe, and effective
- Even in an intensive format of two sessions per day, four days a week, with 6 (!) rotating therapists (Versluis et al., , 2025)
- Adaptations (also see review Schipper et al., 2024):
 - ✓ Tailor to developmental level; child & adolescent protocol; use simple language, slow pace, provide visual aids
 - ✓ Involve significant others
 - ✓ Build a therapeutic relationship characterized by a supportive attitude, taking enough time and providing trust and safety
- Extensive know-how on the scope of EMDR → all the book-chapters are relevant

PTSD in significant others

- Parents with child-related PTSD
- Caregivers with client-related PTSD
- Brothers, sisters, partners traumatized by person with ID

3 to 5
EMDR
sessions

Own childhood trauma

A high risk group	
Parents with MID-BIF	20%-25% of all custody cases (Tøssebro et al., 2017)
Parental PTSD	Parenting limitations (van Ee et al., 2016) Unsafe home environment (Mc Gaw et al., 2017) Child distress and behavioral problems (Lambert et al., 2014)
Outplaced children with MID-BIF	49 % traumatized (≥ 2 ACE's) ACE's in parents related to number of ACE's in children (Vervoot-Schel et al., 2018)

Intensive clinical family
trauma treatment

Case 3

- Mild intellectual disabilities & complex trauma not recognized



Video fragment “about EMDR –therapy”

Trauma recognition and EMDR treatment in persons with ID

**YES
WE
CAN!**



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