

What is Brainspotting?

By Developer and Trainer David Grand, Ph.D.

“Brainspotting is based on the profound attunement of the therapist with the patient, finding a somatic cue and extinguishing it by down-regulating the amygdala. It isn’t just PNS (Parasympathetic Nervous System) activation that is facilitated, it is homeostasis.”

-- Robert Scaer, MD, “The Trauma Spectrum”

Brainspotting is a powerful, focused treatment method that works by identifying, processing, and releasing core neurophysiological sources of emotional/body pain, trauma, dissociation and a variety of other challenging symptoms. Brainspotting is a simultaneous form of diagnosis and treatment, enhanced with Biolateral sound, which is deep and direct yet focused and containing. Brainspotting gives us a tool, within this clinical relationship, to neurobiologically locate, focus, process, and release experiences and symptoms that are typically out of reach of the conscious mind’s 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. Brainspotting is accordingly a physiological tool/treatment which has profound psychological, emotional, and physical consequences.

The use of Brainspotting can support the clinical healing relationship. There is no replacement for a mature and nurturing therapeutic presence and the ability to engage another suffering human in a safe and trusting relationship where they feel heard, accepted, and understood. It is theorized that Brainspotting taps into and harnesses the body’s innate self-scanning capacity to process and release focused areas (systems) which are in a maladaptive homeostasis (frozen primitive survival modes). This may also explain the ability of Brainspotting to often reduce and eliminate body pain and tension associated with physical conditions. A “Brainspot” is the eye position which is related to the energetic/emotional activation of a traumatic/emotionally charged issue within the brain, most likely in the amygdala, the hippocampus, or the orbitofrontal cortex of the limbic system. Located by eye position, paired with externally observed and internally experienced reflexive responses, a Brainspot is actually a physiological subsystem holding emotional experience in memory form.

When a Brainspot is stimulated, the deep brain reflexively signals 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. Reflexive facial expressions are powerful indicators of Brainspots.

The appearance of a reflexive response as the client attends to the somatosensory experience of the trauma, emotional or somatic problem 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 within 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, and activate the body's inherent capacity to heal itself from trauma.

"Inside window" Brainspotting requires the therapist and client to participate together to locate Brainspots through the client's felt sense of the experience at the highest intensity of affect/body distress. Brainspotting can be done with one eye or two. Brainspotting can be directed at distress and can also be directed at establishing and strengthening resources.

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.

Brainspotting processes down to the reflexive core. Often when it appears one has reached a zero distress level, a new strata or floor is broken through, allowing a deeper probing into the brain. The reflexive core is in the deep, unconscious body brain. It is as out of our awareness as respiration, circulation, and digestion. Brainspotting dismantles the trauma, symptom, somatic distress, and dysfunctional beliefs at the reflexive core.

Brainspotting is a "body to body" approach, where the Brainspot is the target or "focus/activation point". Distress is activated and located in the body and the focus/activation point, aka the Brainspot, is found based on eye position. Everything is aimed at activating, locating, and processing the Brainspot. Contrastingly, EMDR is where the traumatic memory is the "target." Brainspotting is most powerful and effective when done with the enhancement of BioLateral Sound. Bilateral sound enhances the brain's processing abilities by alternately stimulating each cerebral hemisphere. For highly dissociated or very fragile clients, Brainspotting can be initiated without any bilateral intensification, which can be added later as the client is more integrated and flexible. The healing sound directly enters the brain through the auditory nerves while the eardrums are vibrated bilaterally.

Any life event which causes significant physical and/or emotional injury and distress, in which the person intensely 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 traumas. Those traumas are held in the body.

In most cases, the traumatized individual does not usually have the opportunity or the support to adequately process and integrate traumatic life events. Traumatic experiences then become 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.

Brainspotting is a physiological therapeutic tool which can be integrated into a wide range of healing modalities, including psychological, as well as somatic approaches to treatment. Brainspotting can be useful as a complement to various body-based therapies including advanced bodywork, chiropractic, acupuncture, physical therapy, nursing, medicine, and other specialized approaches to physical healing. It is a valuable resource in the treatment of varying medical, physical, and psycho-emotional issues and symptoms encountered by health professionals.

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

This description can be found at: <https://brainspotting.com/about-bsp/what-is-brainspotting/>

More information and videos can be found on <https://brainspotting.com/>

Quick Reference- What is Brainspotting?

Brainspotting is a physiological approach with psychological results.

As a therapeutic model it lends itself to getting at material we often cannot reach through words. Brainspotting is a powerful and focused treatment method that works by identifying, processing, and releasing core neuro-physiological sources of emotional/body pain, trauma, dissociation, and a variety of challenging symptoms.

It is an offshoot of EMDR (Eye Movement and Desensitization and Reprocessing) therapy processes. Brainspotting was developed by Dr. David Grand in 2002 and identifies activated eye positions which correspond with the issue of disturbance.

Brainspotting works deep within the limbic system of the brain (deep into the lower mid-brain).

Clients can process bodily responses to an incident with or without words.

Each person's experience will be different and what happens can be unexpected.

Brainspotting encourages no assumptions and no judgments, and works on the belief that each person is unique and has the innate capacity to heal themselves.

The therapist is trained to track what emerges during Brainspotting sessions.

It is the client's inner wisdom that guides the process.

Brainspotting is an approach that utilizes focused mindfulness.

Brainspotting can be extremely effective in treating emotional and stress-related physical conditions, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Hypothetically, a “Brainspot” is activity in the brain and body in response to focus and eye position. It is based on the understanding that “where we look affects how we feel”.

A Brainspot is a physiological capsule holding emotional experience in memory form, like a time capsule. Eye positions can find the time capsule locations and hold the brain’s focus on it. When the brain focuses on a trauma capsule, that trauma begins to release, allowing you to feel it and then return to a state of homeostasis.

Brainspotting- The Process

Once emotion is paired with physical sensation, points are found that the client gazes at in order to process trauma or a variety of issues. These relevant eye positions correlate to neurological stimulation and internal experience so a client is guided to be in a state of focused activation. Brainspotting is a cutting-edge focused treatment method that identifies, then process and releases core neurophysiological sources of emotional and physical pain, trauma, and other challenging patterns. This approach is both psychological and neurological. There are many Brainspots. A “Brainspot” is an eye position that is held while the client mindfully observes their internal experience over time and lets whatever happens happen. It is as if the Brainspot is a key to accessing unconscious material that will lend useful in the healing process.

Resourcing: Resourcing is a part of Brainspotting. The client and therapist work together to gather resources or support for the client to touch the trauma but feel empowered and secure when exploring the trauma so there is no retraumatizing. Resources include the use of breath, working with internal nurturing parts, using creative imagination, finding sacred spaces, using bilateral sound, and having more than one Brainspotting point (when gazing at some spots there is more activation while other spots are less intense and are called resources spots). The intention is to get one spot activated enough to effectively process trauma without becoming overwhelmed.

Attunement and the Therapeutic Process: During Brainspotting the therapist mindfully attunes to the client, remaining acutely aware of verbal and nonverbal responses. There are no assumptions or interpretations as the client finds empowerment and authority from within. The client attunes in a very mindful process to themselves. This strengthens the therapeutic relationship and creates a very organic and sacred space and process.

What to Expect: Sometimes people have performance anxiety about Brainspotting, but Brainspotting can’t be done “wrong”. It is good to approach it with curiosity and to stay curious during the process. You will be guided throughout. Clients have described Brainspotting sessions as timeless, and experiential journeys that result in greater wholeness and a sense of well-being. Physical sensations of numbness, temperature change, tingling, vivid visual memory, and memory flashes are some common sensations, as well as a full range of emotions such as peace, serenity, joy, anger, fear, and helplessness. The more unpleasant emotions are balanced with resourcing (as described above). Calmness is most typically felt by sessions end.

Brainspotting easily combines with talk therapy. The client and therapist will decide together what the best treatment approach is. The number of Brainspotting sessions needed for benefit is also dependent upon the nature of the work one is engaged in.

Brainspotting can be an effective treatment for:

Physical and emotional trauma

Recovery from injury and accident trauma

Anger and rage problems

Anxiety and panic

Addictions (especially cravings)

Stress and trauma resulting from medical illness, interventions, and treatment

Performance issues including sexual dysfunction

Fibromyalgia and other chronic pain conditions

ADD and ADHD

Perceptual problems

Stuttering

Environmental illness and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Phobias

Asthma

Preparation and recovery from surgery

Trauma resulting from war and other natural disasters

Management of major medical illness

Symptoms of traumatic brain injury