

## EMDR WITH ADOPTED CHILDREN

*Anna Rita Verardo*

Attachment theory describes how early childhood attachment relationships between child and caregiver determine the formation of mental patterns, known as Internal Working Models (IWM). Attachment internal working models give rise to a system of memories and expectations (emotions, behaviors and experiences), throughout the entire life of an individual: *from the cradle to the grave* (Bowlby, 1969/1982).

Interactive experiences between a child and caregivers contribute in creating models of the self, of others and of self-with-others. These models are subsequently internalized and, once a parent, they are likely to be repeated within the relationship with his or her child (Bowlby, 1988). This is consistent with attachment theory's perspective, suggesting a continuity in attachment models over the life course, supported by various research studies who confirmed that Internal Working Models developed in the first year of life are preserved throughout adulthood.

Through the adoption process, children with poor attachment who have experienced adversities and neglect within their caregiving system, may have a second chance to overcome their attachment problems and review their Internal Working Model. Adoption could allow these children to experience "a secure base", enabling them to change their mental models formed in early dysfunctional relationships, or due to the caregiver's absence or inaccessibility. An adopted child's history is often marked by several negative experiences, including "cumulative trauma".

The aim of this presentation is to identify how previous experiences of a child can affect his/her relationship with the adoptive parents, underline the importance of the parental response to child's distress, and eventually, inquire adoptive parents' Internal Working Models, highlighting their influence on the quality of the relationship with the child.

To this purpose, a protocol for effective EMDR intervention on child's traumatic experiences will be presented, focusing on how to support the processing and integration of traumatic memories. This presentation will also explain how to identify critical moments within the child-caregiver relationship and how to intervene by providing effective ways to work with the adoptive parents, should their responses include feelings of helplessness, frustration and/or hostility.