

Blog Post by: <https://www.olivemecounseling.com/blog/how-brainspotting>

Brainspotting (BSP) is: a way to jumpstart our bodies' natural ability to process experiences and heal.

That all sounds good, but how exactly does it *work*?

Where You Look Affects How You Feel

Have you ever noticed **where your eyes go** when you're thinking about something painful? Joyful? Sad?

Try thinking of a recent event that was somewhat upsetting (don't think of the biggest painful event - pick something smaller for the purpose of this exercise).

- What **thoughts** come up?
- What **emotion** do you feel right now?
- Where do you feel that emotion in **your body**?
- Where are you **looking**?
- What happens when you **look to the left? Middle? Right? Up? Down?** Does the body/emotional experience become **heightened? Dampened? Move/change?**

For me, when I'm reflecting on a past event that's tinged with sadness, my eyes tend to look to my bottom left. When I'm excited or angry and ready to engage something head on, I tend to look to the dead-center. When I'm feeling overwhelmed, I tend to stare off into the distance to my top left.

What is a Brainspot?

Brainspots are the **eye positions** that give you **more direct access to the emotions/body sensations** (for better or for worse). Everyone has Brainspots for different emotional states (and corresponding thoughts/beliefs) or for various processing experiences. Our Brainspots aren't particularly fixed - I can feel sadness when I'm looking elsewhere, too, but it's just that I

tend to more immediately connect to that emotional state when I'm looking in that direction.

When processing through a particular event (e.g., the death of my pet), my Brainspot **can change locations** depending on what specifically I am sorting through in that particular moment (i.e., *I should have spent more time with her, I miss her, what would things be like now? She's not in pain anymore, so she's okay now*).

Once I find a Brainspot and allow myself to **just notice** whatever thoughts, emotions, body sensations to come and go, eventually the emotional charge will **dissipate** because I will have fully processed it. (Mind you, I am better practiced in Brainspotting, so you might not be able to easily do this by yourself.)

Whatever might have been **initially upsetting** would **shift** into something **more soothing/grounding**. Instead of being **knocked off balance** from having been **triggered**, I would be able to be **more calm** and **ready to engage** whatever is **ACTUALLY** happening in front of me, not what I **THINK** or **FEEL** is happening.

Intentionally **noticing** where our eyes go when we're reflecting on something (vs. accidentally finding ourselves doing so) and dedicating **focused attention** on it until we fully process that experience is what **Brainspotting Therapy** is about.

Can't I Just Do Brainspotting By Myself?

It's entirely possible for us to do Brainspotting on our own. This is called **Self-Brainspotting** (duh). **Gazespotting** (the thousand-mile stare) is one example of Self-Brainspotting, though a lot of people might find themselves accidentally doing it and getting caught in the emotional whirlpool that amplifies their reactions.

For more mild discomforting experiences (feeling jittery about your upcoming interview), experimenting with the steps listed above, then finding an eye position that you can "**massage**

out” the “emotional knot” with *might* be enough for you to move forward.

However, there is a **risk** to this: Once you open that barrel, you might find that there’s **more stuff tangled up** with it that you might not be able to handle by yourself. **Once the barrel’s opened, you might not be able to close it easily until everything in there is cleared out.**

If you sense that this might be the case for you, it would be best for you to connect with a **Brainspotting-trained therapist** who can help you process the heavy-duty stuff and can also train you how to safely do it on your own (when appropriate).

Why Brainspotting Therapy?

Imagine that processing significant experiences is like **deep water diving**. The **further down** the diver swims (into their nonconscious/subcortical brain), the **darker** the water gets and the **harder** it becomes to tell which side is up. When people get **triggered**, they feel **disoriented** because the past messily spills into the present.

Deep diving is still necessary to **dig through the shipwreck remains** (process painful experiences) and **excavate lost treasure** (gain fresh perspectives and healing), but in order for the diver to go deeper more effectively (and make it back unscathed), they need **another person** to be sitting in the boat on the surface who’s **trained to reliably pull the diver out** when it’s time or when things get risky. That person is the **Brainspotting therapist**.

Sometimes, the sheer knowledge that there’s someone sitting on the boat watching out for their wellbeing may infuse the diver with greater peace and courage to dive even more deeply than they would doing it alone.

What Does Brainspotting Therapy Involve?

In a typical talk therapy session, the client usually shares about whatever they're experiencing, with the therapist asking questions, supporting them in enhancing self-insight, reframing perspectives, or teaching new skills. However, the benefits of talk therapy can be limited if the client gets so emotionally triggered outside of session that they forget whatever they learned in session.

Brainspotting Therapy involves the therapist intentionally giving space for the client to process out emotional reactions **as they come up in session**, instead of just talking about them.

For example, if the client is feeling a knot in their stomach at the thought of giving a presentation, the Brainspotting therapist asks them to **notice what thoughts, emotions, and body sensations** they're feeling now, then prompts them to **find a specific Brainspot/eye position** where the client feels it all more directly.

Once the Brainspot is found, the client directs their full attention on whatever is happening inside of them, while the therapist directs their full attention on the client from the outside. The Brainspotting process continues until the client has fully processed the issue or until session time comes to an end.

Since Brainspotting is a subcortical, deep-brained rapid processing method, the client may feel **emotionally exhausted** afterwards (think of each Brainspotting experience as equivalent to 10+ talk therapy sessions!). The client's body will also likely be continuing processing for whatever else is left. In the following session, the therapist checks in on what emotional residues seem to remain with the topic, and continue Brainspotting as needed or desired.

What comes next?

Stop getting caught in the emotional whirlpool!

If you've tried and felt **frustrated with regular talk therapy**, or if you're finding yourself **getting triggered often**, Brainspotting Therapy might be right for you. If you're in California, let's see if you and I might be a good fit!