



Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET)

NET is an individual therapy designed to help people process overwhelming experiences. We call these traumatic experiences.

Some people who have been through such experiences are still greatly troubled by them later on in life. They return in frightening memories, flashbacks and nightmares. Many people try not to talk or think about these experiences. That takes a lot of effort. Many people also become angry or irritated easily, and are easily startled. Sleeping problems is another complaint that is often mentioned. These complaints are all part of the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The best way to treat these complaints is by bringing the overwhelming and traumatic events back to mind. It is in this way that the traumatic experiences are processed best.

How long does the therapy take?

The duration of the treatment varies, depending on the number of overwhelming events you have been through. The number of sessions will be determined at the start of the treatment. The idea is to strictly adhere to this arrangement. Usually, a NET therapy takes six to twelve talks of, generally, 90 minutes. Because the processing usually continues after the therapy, it is not recommended to start another treatment to follow NET straightaway. It is better to observe a few months' break between treatments.

Are there any side effects?

After a therapy session you will often feel more distressed for a few days because of the memories you have recalled during the therapy. That is a sign of your processing them. But ultimately, the complaints will diminish. You can discuss with your therapist what you could do to deal with these reactions as well as possible.



ARQ Centrum'45 is the Dutch national centre for specialist diagnostics and treatment of people with complex psychotrauma complaints.
www.arqcentrum45.org

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How does NET work?

In NET treatment, thoughts about traumatic events are recalled, but what is specific to NET is that all significant events are placed within the perspective of your entire life.

In the first session, your therapist will explain how NET works and how your complaints will be reduced by means of this therapy. In the next session, together with your therapist you lay out a string or ribbon that represents your lifeline. The lifeline starts at your birth and continues up to the present day.

To mark the beautiful moments there are various (artificial) flowers for you to choose from. For the adverse or traumatic moments there are a number of “stones” from which you make your choice. You place the flowers and stones along your lifeline and you name them, for instance, “wedding”, “birth of my child” (flowers, usually), or “accident”, “shooting”, “abuse” or “torture” (stones, usually).

With the help of your therapist you narrate the most significant events in your life, starting with your early childhood. You do not only talk about the adverse events but also about the pleasant and beautiful events. You try to go into as much detail as you possibly can while you talk about feelings and thoughts, and you observe how this affects your emotions, thoughts and body. Especially the difficult moments will be discussed in detail. Talking extensively about your memories, including the circumstances in which they were formed, will slowly reduce the pain that has come to accompany these memories. In this manner you, with the assistance of your therapist, overcome the fears that go together with these memories, you process your traumatic experiences and you develop a better image of your whole life.

A report is made of the treatment, a document of your life story. You will receive this document at the end of the treatment, and it is your decision what you do with this document.

Is NET effective?

NET is an effective therapy for people who have been exposed to several traumatic events in their life. Scientific research into the effectiveness of NET has shown that with most patients the complaints diminish significantly. Memories lose their emotional charge. It becomes easier to think back on the event. In many cases the images of the memories change: they become less intrusive, for instance, or vaguer. But the therapy may also bring about new thoughts and insights that give a different, less threatening meaning to the event. These effects help to anchor the overwhelming experiences better in your life history. The effect of the therapy may sometimes continue for several months after the NET treatment.



Questions?

Please direct all your questions to your NET therapist or your main therapist.