

Guiding Therapists Through Parts in Dissociative Disorders

DOLORES MOSQUERA, PSY.



Psychologist Dolores Mosquera was trained in EMDR in 2005, became a consultant in 2007, and an EMDR Europe trainer in 2017. She has extensive teaching experience leading seminars, workshops, and lectures internationally. She has participated as a guest speaker in numerous conferences and workshops throughout Europe, Asia, Australia, and North, Central, and South America. Having published 15 books and numerous articles on personality disorders, complex trauma, and dissociation, Mosquera is a recognized expert in this field. She also teaches in several Universities and supervising clinical psychologists in postgraduate training programs in Spain. She received the David Servan-Schreiber award for outstanding contributions to the EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Processing) field in 2017, and was made a Fellow of the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation in 2018, for her important contributions to the trauma and dissociation field.

Deepening Care in Spain

Our Go With That staff discovered while interviewing Dolores Mosquera that she was born in New York and was raised between Spain and New York and moved to Spain permanently when she was 18 years old. After her studies in psychology and completing a Masters in Clinical Psychology, she founded a private practice in 1998, in Sada, her area of residence, which is a small town in the city of A Coruña. In 2004 Mosquera opened a second clinic in A Coruña and, in 2007, opened the third center in Santiago de Compostela, the city that since 812 AD has been the heart of the famed Way of St. James, a pilgrim's path that today is part of UNESCO's World Heritage Site.

While working with complex cases, Mosquera decided to deepen her work in the personality disorder field and later received training in the effects of early traumatization and dissociative disorders. In 2012 she founded INTRA-TP, an Institute for the Study of trauma and Personality Disorders. Today, Mosquera collaborates with two different domestic violence (DV) programs, one focused on women victims of DV and another one on males with violent behavior. She belongs to the Spanish National Network for the Assistance of Victims of Terrorism and also collaborates

with an organization that aids victims of emergencies, accidents, violent attacks, kidnappings, and other traumatic incidents.

Exploring New Pathways

Mosquera credits her clients as her main inspiration and best teachers. Her curiosity led her to explore new pathways into treatment, always trying to improve the clinical challenges and what more the profession could offer trauma survivors. As a result, Mosquera became trained in diverse trauma approaches and specialized in dissociative disorders.

While dissociation seems like a daunting condition to encounter as a therapist, Mosquera has much to say to therapists who have reservations or fears around dissociative clients and touts the benefits of working through dissociation. "More than from a theoretical or conceptual point of view, the work with dissociation starts from actual encounters with some forms of dissociation in trauma patients. Conceptually, dissociation has many different meanings and is frequently misunderstood," she says. "Actually, dissociation makes perfect sense once we understand the natural development of a child and how that development – and sense of self – are interrupted by severe trauma. There is a proportional

link between trauma and dissociation: the more complex, early, and horrible the traumatic experiences, the more complex the structure of the repeated dissociation (and its manifestations).

As with any other kind of complex problem, to overcome fears, it is important for clinicians to get trained and get supervision. Knowledge is power. The more these conditions can be identified, diagnosed, and understood, the better they can be treated.

"Therapists tend to avoid dissociative disorders because they don't understand them well, not because they are untreatable," she continues. "In contrast, when treatment is done in a wise way, the outcomes for complex traumatic/dissociative disorders are good, as the research of Bethany Brand and the multicenter Top-DD Study have shown. Dissociative disorders can seem like a daunting condition if clinicians are not trained or familiar with the frequent problems that can be encountered in therapy. On the other hand, some clinicians overdiagnose dissociative disorders or think ego states are the same as a dissociative part and introduce interventions that are not needed."

Changing Perspectives Toward Dissociative Clients

Mosquera sees many therapists facing trouble with their dissociative clients – and has been able to help them overcome their challenges through her trainings and consultations. She talks about those stories and her results. “One of the things I like about training is to see the swift shift in perspective, usually from a negative view of the cases or their capacity as therapist to a more motivated perspective, eager to try out what they have learned during the training.

“This is a wonderful experience. And I have to thank my clients because, through their cases examples, I can help many colleagues understand how to work with the difficulties they present. Seeing the changes and how to achieve them is a huge motivation, or so I have been told.

“For example, I have met many colleagues who have wanted to refer a case, and I have said, ‘How about we supervise it first?’ From there, they have been able to continue the work and get good results. It is really fantastic to be able to help out. This is what I missed in the beginning of my work. I was working with really complex cases, and some of my teachers basically encourage me to give up and turn to other ‘more treatable cases’.”

Using a Trauma-Informed Approach

The model Mosquera will be presenting is a trauma-informed approach to the work with dissociative parts (Mosquera, 2019). It is a structured model with practical guidelines to set up the therapeutic work, to get descriptions and ideas about how the inner dissociative world of the client works, and to obtain sufficient co-operation with and among parts: all these aspects allow the client and the therapist to deal with moments of confusion and stuck points, while maintaining the direction toward the clinical goals. “I have developed specific steps to keep in mind during the therapeutic work, 10 basic steps that can guide our work and help us with organization,” Mosquera explains, “and a guide to structure the clinical sessions depending on the type of situations we encounter.”

Having a clear structure that can be flexible and adaptable is key in the treatment of dissociative disorders. “It is easy to get lost in the chaos and lose the perception of what we are doing if we don’t have a clear perceptual guide. My model also includes a specific case conceptualization for dissociative disorders that is meant to help gather the information that can help us understand the presenting problems and conceptualize the case.” Mosquera also uses elements of the Progressive Approach to dissociative disorders,

with specific EMDR-based techniques to process gradually and safely.

What to Listen for in Her Presentation

“I will be presenting the model a published in my latest book and illustrating the theory with case examples. I hope participants can take home a way of conceptualizing dissociative disorder cases that can be useful to organize the work. I also hope that presenting the structure and the steps can be a good guide to learn and implement this approach.”

When asked about the spark that inspired her work, Mosquera says that EMDR has been a life changer in her work. “I felt I needed tools and felt stuck with many of my more complex cases. I must say EMDR and training in trauma and dissociation has been the perfect combination I needed to understand the difficulties and what I needed to change and adapt.”

What does Mosquera consider key ingredients in this area? “We need to trust the process and be familiar with the AIP model. In dissociative disorders, we need to promote curiosity, compassion, and cooperation in our clients. To be able to do this, we need to be curious, have compassion, and be able and enjoy cooperative work.”

Understanding how to work with dissociative disorders with EMDR is crucially important to Mosquera and to the success of this field. She laments

Thursday, September 12, 8:30AM - 3:30PM

Working with Parts in Dissociative Disorders: A Practical Guide for EMDR Therapists

Presentation Description: Many therapists report problems in working with patients with dissociative disorders, especially when developing the treatment plan, structuring the sessions, or managing the patient’s internal conflict as well as working with those parts that are most challenging. When parts are stuck in trauma, it is easy to encounter a wide range of difficulties in therapy. Some of the main problems are related to the internal conflict presented by these patients, who show difficulties in regulatory capacities, distrust and hostility. Working with EMDR requires approaching the difficulties of this clinical population as well as developing skills to adapt the procedures and techniques.

Teaching Methods: This workshop will describe useful concepts to help therapists understand patients with dissociative disorders and organize the work plan with EMDR. In addition, a variety of techniques and tools for the different steps of the work will be illustrated, allowing for safe interventions with various types of clinical problems and dissociative parts. A conceptualization model developed specifically for dissociative disorders will be presented as well as a guide to carry out a treatment plan adapted to several common difficulties (Mosquera, 2019)



how colleagues give up on EMDR, thinking it is not fit for the more complex cases and turning to other models. "I don't think it's about the model," Mosquera concludes. "I think it's about not understanding how to conceptualize the cases using both the Adaptive Information Processing model and complex trauma and dissociative lens, linked together in a clinically efficient way.

I really like working with dissociative disorders using EMDR. It can be very effective. It is also important for clinicians to recognize and become more aware of dissociative symptoms to assess the need of doing stabilization prior to the treatment of traumatic memories with EMDR when needed. "

Recommended Resources

Boon, Steele & Van der Hart (2011) *Coping with Trauma-Related Dissociation: Skills Training for Patients and Therapists*. (Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology.) New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Gonzalez, A., & Mosquera, D. (2012). *EMDR and dissociation: The progressive approach*. [English edition]. Charleston, SC: Amazon Imprint.

Knipe, J. (2017). *EMDR Toolbox* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co.

Mosquera, D. (2019). *Working with Voices and Dissociative Parts. A trauma-informed Approach*. Kindle Direct Publishing.

Steele, K., Boon, S., & Van der Hart, O. (2017). *Treating trauma-related dissociation; A practical integrative approach*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.



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Roger Solomon is a psychologist specializing in the areas of trauma and grief. He is a senior trainer for the EMDR Institute, providing basic and advanced EMDR trainings and workshops internationally. He is the author of 42 articles and book chapters focusing on grief, complex trauma and dissociation, and law enforcement.

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