

Debra Wesselmann, EMDR Expert, Says Treating Trauma at Its Root Can Help Break the Cycle of Self-Medication

Debra Wesselmann reveals how unresolved trauma can drive self-medication and unhealthy coping—and why EMDR therapy may be the key to lasting change

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, August 10, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Trauma can be devastating. But when left untreated, it can become life-altering and, in some cases, life-threatening, leaving people struggling to find a way forward. For some, the pain can lead to self-medication as they search for relief from overwhelming emotions and memories. Yet, there is help. A recent KOLD 13 News "Tucson Now" interview with Sallie Tyrrell from Cottonwood Tucson Treatment Center examines EMDR therapy and the negative effects of self-medication, raising a critical question: What happens when people try to manage the effects of trauma without addressing the trauma itself?



Debra Wesselmann

For [Debra Wesselmann](#), an author and EMDR therapist with more than 35 years of experience, the conversation reflects a fundamental principle she has witnessed throughout her career: when trauma remains unresolved, people may struggle to make healthy choices as their brains and bodies remain focused on protection and survival.

"I listened with interest to the interview on 'Tucson Now,'" says Wesselmann. "Ms. Tyrrell highlights EMDR as her 'favorite therapy' because it effectively activates the parts of the brain needed to process difficult memories and store them in an adaptive form."

Wesselmann says the connection between childhood trauma and unhealthy coping behaviors is

supported by decades of research, including the landmark Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, which examined the long-term effects of childhood adversity.

“Individuals suffering the effects of early childhood trauma often aren’t capable of making healthy lifestyle choices because their brain and body are wired for self-protection,” Wesselmann says. “They may not be able to cope unless they receive professional help with the emotions, sensations, and images that haunt them.”

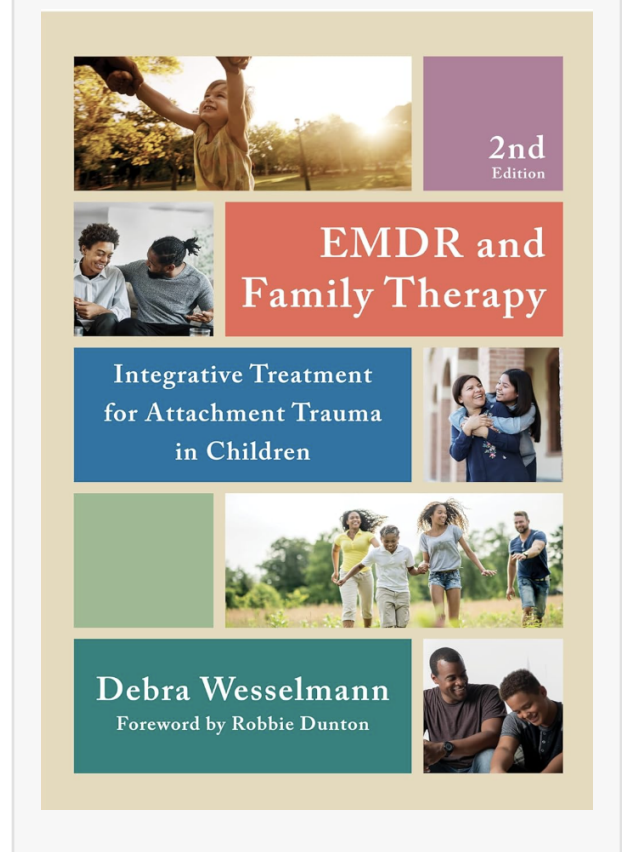
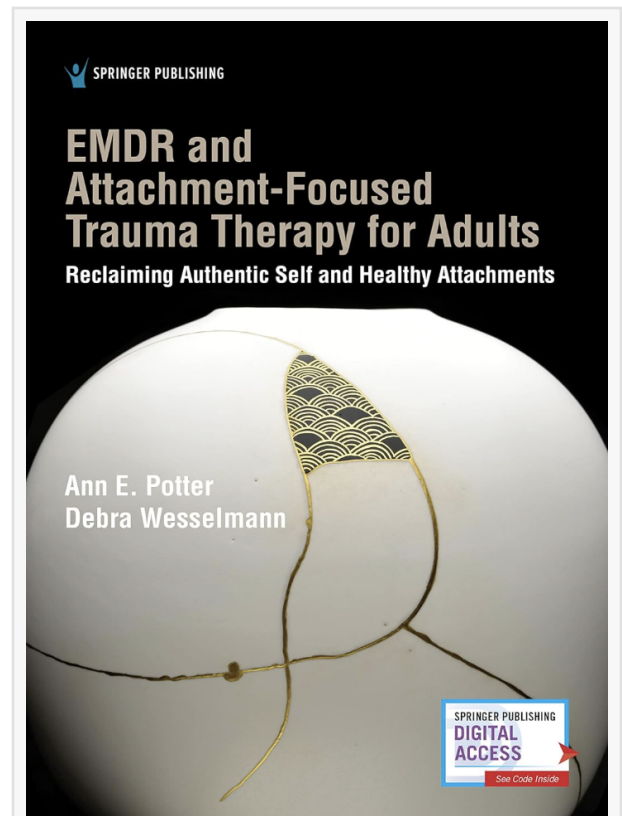
Wesselmann believes it is important to understand what may be driving the behavior. For some individuals, substances or other high-risk behaviors become attempts to escape overwhelming memories, emotions, and physical sensations associated with unresolved trauma. According to the latest data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 48.4 million Americans age 12 and older, or 16.8% of the population, experienced a substance use disorder in 2024.

Wesselmann says EMDR can offer a less verbally demanding approach to trauma therapy, particularly for individuals who have experienced extreme or deeply personal trauma that may be difficult, painful, or embarrassing to discuss.

“I integrate EMDR with other approaches, but I share Ms. Tyrrell’s preference for EMDR therapy above all others,” Wesselmann says. “I’ve practiced EMDR therapy for over 35 years, and I’m deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to give my clients new choices for how they want to live their lives.”

The conversation surrounding EMDR reflects a broader shift in how trauma is understood and treated. Instead of asking only how someone can stop an unhealthy behavior, trauma-informed care asks a deeper question: What pain is the behavior attempting to manage?

“EMDR therapy calms distressing emotions, sensations, thoughts, and intrusive images, calms



the nervous system, and removes triggers,” Wesselmann concludes. “Completion of EMDR therapy allows traumatized individuals to make new, healthy lifestyle choices.”

About Debra Wesselmann

Debra Wesselmann, MS, LIMHP, is a clinician, researcher, author, speaker, and EMDR trainer with more than three decades of experience specializing in trauma and attachment. She is a trainer with the EMDR Institute of Dr. Francine Shapiro and serves on the editorial board of the Journal of EMDR Practice and Research. Wesselmann co-founded the Attachment and Trauma Center of Nebraska and developed the Integrative Attachment Trauma Protocol for Children (IATP-C), which integrates [EMDR and family therapy](#) to address attachment trauma. She is also the co-developer of Adult Attachment-Focused Trauma Therapy (AFTT-A) and provides specialty EMDR training on attachment trauma to clinicians worldwide. Wesselmann has authored and co-authored books, including EMDR and Family Therapy: Integrative Treatment for Attachment Trauma in Children and EMDR and [Attachment-Focused Trauma Therapy for Adults: Reclaiming Authentic Self and Healthy Attachments](#), professional chapters, and journal articles focused on trauma, attachment, and healing.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.debrawesselmann.com/>

Debra Wesselmann is available for interviews.

Amanda Kent
Boundless Media USA
+1 313 403 5636
[email us here](#)

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