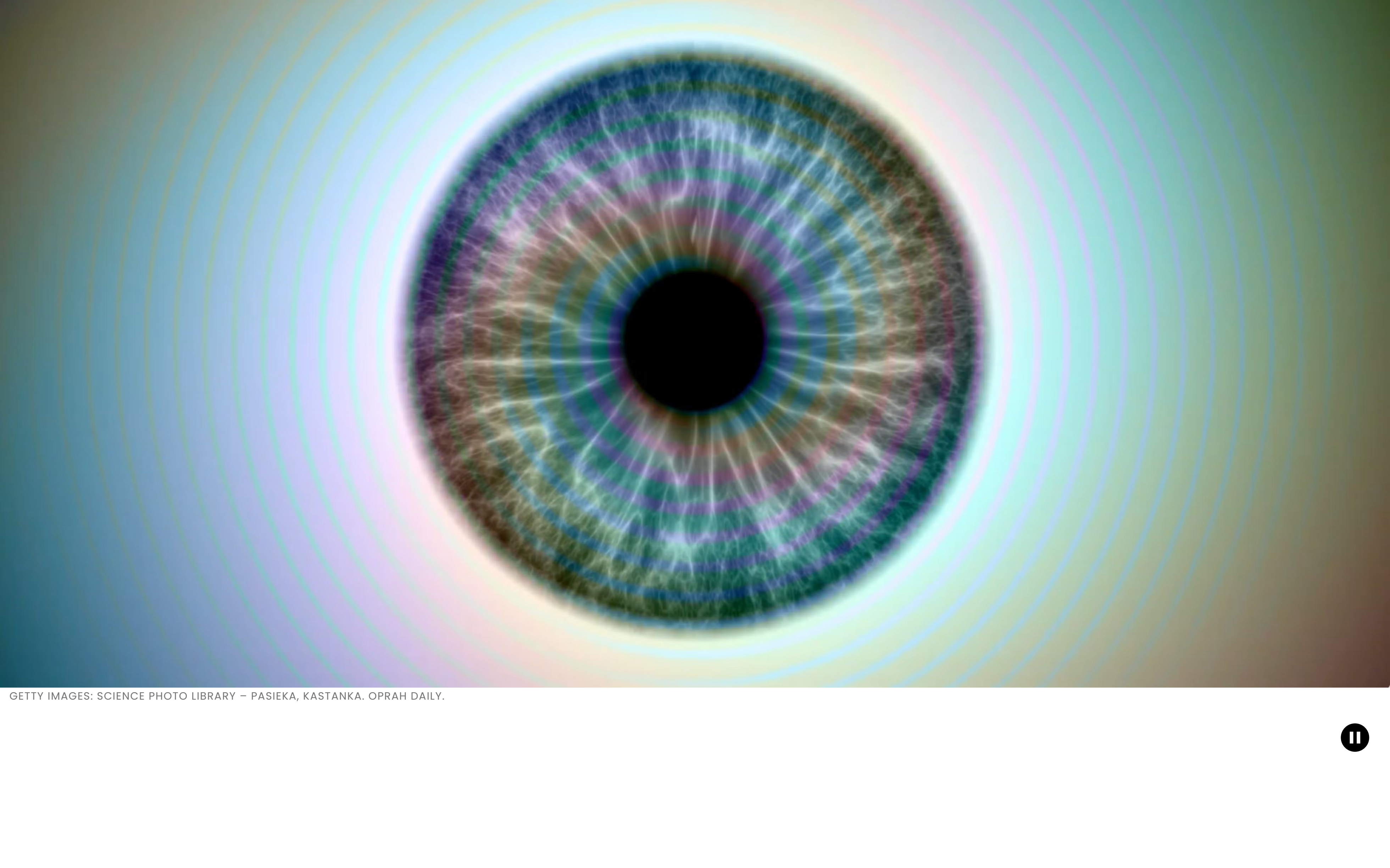


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Lifestyle > Wellness

My Eye-Opening Experience with ‘Brainspotting’ Therapy

Uncovering a long-buried memory through this method freed me from decades of crippling indecision.

By Aileen WeintraubPublished: Feb 06, 2026 11:41 AM EST

SAVE ARTICLE



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I’m standing in the supermarket trying to decide between Manchego cheese and cheddar, but I’m paralyzed with indecision. There are too many choices. And, for some inexplicable reason, I don’t trust myself to make the right one.

Until two months ago, this is how every grocery store trip went for me.

I know the stakes are low: It’s cheese, not open-heart surgery. But that indecision has plagued me all of my adult life. I even put off bigger, more important choices—like finding a new doctor or deciding the next step in my career—as long as possible because I don’t trust myself to make the right call. And that’s a big deal.

Last fall, it got to the point where I couldn’t even pick an entrée at a restaurant (prompting some serious side-eye from friends). I knew it was time to address the problem. My life coach, who had been helping me figure out some other personal sh*t, suggested I try brainspotting (BSP).

BSP is a newish form of therapy meant to alleviate anxiety, depression, grief, and post-traumatic stress disorder. It was developed in 2003 by psychotherapist [David Grand](#), PhD, LCSW, and the concept is that patients follow an object slowly with their eyes (or hold their gaze in a fixed spot) to help the brain uncover (and then release) traumatic experiences. It was possible, my coach told me, that my paralyzing indecisiveness could be due to some unresolved trauma from my past—and BSP, which she also practiced, might help uncover it.

Eyes Wide Open

I have to admit: I quite literally rolled my eyes when I first heard about BSP. It sounded like next-level woo...and that’s coming from someone who tried [hypnotherapy to calm down before a surgery](#).

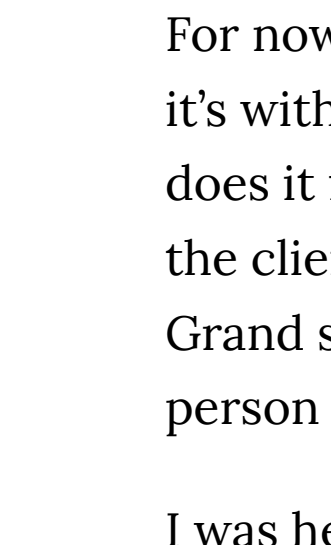
Proponents of BSP believe there are areas in a person’s visual gaze—say, looking toward the ceiling, or out of the left corner of your eye—that are linked to traumatic experiences, says licensed psychotherapist [Elizabeth Handy](#). These areas are called “brainspots.” During a session, a trained practitioner asks you to follow a pointer or their fingers with your eyes until a painful memory is activated. (Hello, brainspot!) The practitioner will then verbally guide you through the memory, asking you to stay with it a little longer than may feel comfortable, and then suggesting ways to let it go.

Grand first developed the concept after working with a professional figure skater who was stuck trying to master a triple loop jump. In a session, Grand asked her to visualize the feeling of coming out of a jump, while he moved his fingers very slowly in front of her eyes. “When I got over right next to the bridge of her nose, her eye went into this intense wobble,” he says. “For the next 10 minutes, she was just looking at my fingers, and observing that she was seeing trauma after trauma come up.”

The next day, Grand’s client called him from the rink to say she’d completed her first successful triple loop. “That got my attention,” he says. “So I started looking at my other clients for those eye anomalies: wobbles, hard blinks, squinting. Anytime I saw that, I stopped there, and then the processing went deeper and deeper.” He shared his findings with other therapists, and the method quickly gained momentum. (According to Grand’s website, over 20,000 therapists have since been trained in BSP.)

“THAT’S THE PAYOFF TO ME: THAT SOMETHING HAS CHANGED FOR THE PERSON IN THEIR BRAIN AND THEIR BODY.”

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While research on this modality is limited, I did find a [2022 study in which](#) participants reported significantly reduced distress in the days following BSP. And in a 2021 survey of 112 therapists, most of whom were trained in BSP, [82 percent](#) reported that clients on average responded better to BSP than the more well-known [EMDR](#) (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy), a well-researched, but intense, trauma therapy based on bilateral sensory stimulation combined with talk therapy.

That said, brainspotting is not accepted universally in psychiatric circles. (Some researchers even call it [pseudoscience](#).) Handy, who is a BSP practitioner, admits that more [studies are needed](#), particularly to understand what’s actually going on in the brain during a session.

For now, BSP is considered an [alternative therapy](#). But that doesn’t mean it’s without merit. “When I ask a client, ‘What does it feel like now? What does it feel like in your body?’ after an hour of processing, on the spot, the client says the painful memory looks like it’s further away, it’s faded,” Grand says. “That’s the payoff to me: that something has changed for the person in their brain and their body.”

I was hesitant, but, after a lot of mental back and forth (shocker!), I decided to go for it.

Uncovering Lost Memories

My coach and I started by talking about my goals for the session—trying to understand my indecisiveness—over Zoom. Then she pulled out her “magic wand” (a pointer) and instructed me to follow it with my eyes as she moved it slowly from side to side. (This might sound like EMDR, except BSP uses very slow, methodical movements rather than a rapid back and forth.) As I followed the pointer with my gaze, she asked me to focus on where I was feeling pain in my body.

“Umm, everywhere,” I responded as a woman in full-on menopause. But after taking a few moments to pause and reflect, I zeroed in on a dull aching sensation in my right hip.

Then she slowed her pointer down, moving it just slightly until the pain felt even more intense. We had found the “brainspot” in my field of vision, a little off to the right. As I held my gaze on that spot, I wondered what my hip pain had to do with any of this.

Apparently, a lot. “There is no separation between what we feel emotionally, and what we feel in our bodies,” says Grand—referring to the theory of stored trauma popularized by psychiatric researcher Bessel van der Kolk, MD, in his bestselling book *The Body Keeps the Score*.

Once I was fully focused on my brainspot and the hip pain, things started to get wild. A scene popped into my head.

I was in sixth grade, and the entire class was whispering. None of us had understood the previous night’s math homework, and we were worried about getting in trouble. I decided to be the first to tell our teacher that I hadn’t completed the assignment.

I walked up to Mr. B’s desk. The class’s murmurs died down. All eyes were on me.

“Mr. B, I didn’t understand the homework assignment,” I squeaked.

My teacher unleashed a tsunami of terror directly in my face, yelling at me for my incompetence. I turned red, paralyzed with fear. He was screaming so loud I could see his uvula swinging in the back of his throat and his spit flying through the air. I started to tremble in front of the whole class. I had made a terrible miscalculation.

I hadn’t cried that day in sixth grade, but I was crying now, tears streaming down my cheeks, 40 years later. I wondered if this experience of a male authority figure, humiliating and belittling me in front of all of my peers for a simple mistake, had been manifesting itself as lifelong physical pain in my hip, and through my inability to trust myself to make even the most basic decisions.

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Doing the Work

Now it was time to try and change the neural pathways in my brain. My coach asked me to replace that buried memory with a new, future scenario that made me feel empowered. This was an opportunity to rewrite the narrative I’d been subconsciously telling myself for years: that I make bad decisions and get punished for them. I closed my eyes and imagined being loved and supported by my friends and family. We were all sitting around laughing, and everyone was content. No one was yelling at me or putting me down. I didn’t have to overthink the vision; it just popped into my head.

After the session, I was so emotionally drained that I slept for 10 hours. But the next day, my hip felt noticeably better. “It feels like you’re carrying a weight on your shoulders. When that’s alleviated, you can see the change. You really feel the difference in your body,” says Grand.

I was shocked that one single moment decades ago, that I had all but forgotten, had seemingly affected my whole life. I could finally move forward.

Back at the grocery store a few days later, I stood in the cheese aisle—yes, I eat too much cheese—and this time, I told myself, “Trust yourself. Nothing bad will happen if you pick the wrong cheese.” As a matter of fact, I realized, there is no such thing as the *wrong* cheese! I grabbed a creamy ricotta and threw it in my cart. Slowly, I was learning to be more decisive and, more importantly, trust myself. Now, my goal was to take that confidence and apply it to the bigger decisions in my life that were holding me back, like saying yes to a risky career move.

BSP has given me a new appreciation of how certain events, even seemingly small ones, shaped me into who I am today. Armed with this knowledge, I can work on rerouting those neural pathways. “People, even in the darkest places, can overcome trauma,” says Handy. I’m learning how to release mine.

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