

Client Handout



What is Phase One of EMDR Therapy?

Most people start therapy because something is going wrong in their lives, such as relationship struggles, anxiety, depression, feelings of worthlessness, or feeling overwhelmed. EMDR therapy is an eight-phase psychotherapy approach that helps you tie your current problems to unresolved stressful situations. Those past events can be stuck in your system with the attached feelings, body sensations, thoughts, and/or images. During the first few sessions of EMDR therapy (Phase One), the goal is to learn enough about you to see how EMDR therapy might work for you, and to plan the course of your treatment.

What happens during the first few meetings?

Your EMDR therapist will build a strong working relationship with you by learning about who you are and valuing you as an individual. They will be curious about what identities you hold and be mindful of how your personal context and culture impact your present difficulties.

The therapist will assess your readiness for EMDR reprocessing and move at a pace that works for you. This may include (but is not limited to) exploring your support system, your ways of coping with distress, any physical health issues, and the history of your family and community.

While planning your treatment, your therapist will help you identify themes and make a game plan for how to tackle the sources of your current problems.



What do I need to do?

Be as honest as you can be.

You won't need to talk in depth about past trauma, but your therapist will need some idea about what you have experienced. If you compare your life to a book, your therapist needs to know the names of the chapters (like a table of contents), they do not need to know all the information within that chapter. With this approach, you can share as you feel comfortable.

Ask questions.

Feel free to ask your therapist any questions about the process at any time. Share your highs, lows, and in-between. Tell your therapist if you get overwhelmed during the process and need extra support and also share any successes or good things that are happening. Your therapist will be on the lookout for how you are doing, but they also need to hear from you.

Source: Urdaneta, V., & Triana, V. (2020). Playful and creative approaches for EMDR therapy with Latinx children. In A. Beckley-Forest & A. Monaco (Eds.), *EMDR with children in the play therapy room: An integrated approach* (pp. 223-250). Springer.