Discover EMDR Therapy.

A powerful approach to healing trauma!



Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing

A client guide to what EMDR is, what to expect, and how treatment is paced
You may have heard about EMDR as a treatment for trauma, or perhaps your therapist has suggested it as one option for your care.

EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. It is a structured, trauma-focused psychotherapy that can help people process memories and experiences that continue to affect them in the present.

EMDR is most established as a treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and research also supports its use within broader trauma-informed clinical practice. Current clinical guidelines include EMDR among evidence-supported treatments for PTSD.

What is EMDR?

When we experience something overwhelming, frightening, or distressing, the experience can sometimes continue to feel emotionally or physically "present" long after the event has ended.

You may notice:

- Strong emotional reactions to reminders
- Feeling on edge or constantly alert
- Disturbing memories or images
- Nightmares
- Avoiding certain people, places, or situations
- Physical reactions when something reminds you of the experience
- Feeling disconnected, numb, or overwhelmed
- Negative beliefs about yourself
- Feeling as though you are back in the experience rather than remembering it

EMDR is designed to help process these experiences so that they become less distressing and less disruptive to your present life.

The goal is not to erase a memory.

Instead, the goal is for the memory to become something you can remember without experiencing the same level of emotional or physical distress.



What makes EMDR different?

One of the things that makes EMDR different from some other trauma therapies is that you generally do not need to provide a detailed account of everything that happened.

Your therapist may ask you for enough information to understand what you are working on, but you remain in control of what you share.

During the processing phase, you may briefly focus on a memory, image, thought, emotion, or body sensation while engaging in **bilateral stimulation.**

Bilateral stimulation may involve:

- Following your therapist's fingers with your eyes
- Watching a light move from side to side
- Alternating taps
- Alternating sounds

Your therapist will discuss the options with you and determine what is appropriate.

EMDR is more than eye movements

You may have heard that EMDR is simply "moving your eyes while thinking about trauma."

It is much more than that.

EMDR follows a structured eight-phase approach that includes history-taking, preparation, identifying treatment targets, processing, and evaluating progress. Your therapist will not begin processing a difficult memory simply because you have decided to try EMDR.

Preparation is an important part of EMDR.

What can I expect?

1. Understanding your experiences

Your therapist will learn about what brings you to therapy, your history, current concerns, strengths, supports, and goals. Together, you will identify what you would like treatment to help with.



2.Preparation and building resources

Before processing difficult memories, you will learn strategies to help you manage distress and remain grounded.

Depending on your needs, this may include:

- Grounding techniques
- Breathing strategies
- Mindfulness
- Identifying supportive people
- Developing internal resources
- Creating a calming or safe mental space
- Learning ways to manage difficult emotions and body sensations
- Developing a plan for what to do if you become overwhelmed

You do not have to be ready to process trauma immediately.

Sometimes several sessions are spent building stability and resources before processing begins.

3. Choosing what to work on

You and your therapist will decide together what experiences or situations are appropriate to address.

Treatment does not necessarily begin with the most difficult experience.

Sometimes it is helpful to begin with a less intense memory, current trigger, or related experience before working toward something more difficult.

Your therapist will consider your current circumstances, readiness, resources, and treatment goals when determining how to proceed.

What to expect continued...

4. Processing

When you and your therapist determine that you are ready, you may be asked to briefly bring a particular memory, image, thought, feeling, or body sensation to mind.

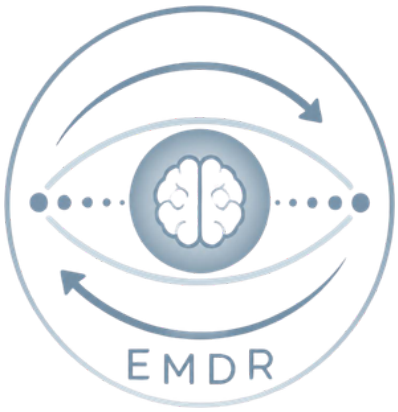
At the same time, you will engage in bilateral stimulation.

Your therapist may ask you to simply notice what comes up.

You do not need to force anything to happen.
You may notice:

- Memories
- Thoughts
- Emotions
- Body sensations
- Images
- Associations
- New perspectives
- Changes in how the memory feels

There is no "right" way to experience EMDR.





5. Integration

As treatment progresses, the experience may begin to feel different.

You may notice that:

- The memory feels further away
- The emotional intensity decreases
- Your body feels less activated
- Triggers become easier to manage
- Distressing beliefs about yourself change
- You feel more capable or in control
- You can think about what happened without feeling as though it is happening again

The goal is not to change the facts of what happened.

The goal is to change how the experience affects you now.

Will I have to talk about my trauma?

Not necessarily.
EMDR does not generally require you to describe every detail of a traumatic experience.

You may be asked to identify important aspects of the experience, but you do not have to tell your story in detail for EMDR to take place.

If there are things you do not want to discuss, tell your therapist.

Your therapist will work with you to determine what information is clinically necessary and what level of detail feels appropriate.

What if I become overwhelmed?

You are not expected to "push through." Your therapist will monitor your level of distress and help you stay within a manageable range.

You can:
Pause.
Slow down.
Take a break.
Use a grounding strategy.
Change the target.
Return to preparation.
Stop the exercise.

EMDR is a collaborative process. You and your therapist make decisions together about the pace and focus of treatment.

What might I notice between sessions?

Everyone responds to EMDR differently. You may notice changes in dreams, memories, emotions, body sensations, or reactions to triggers. You may also feel tired after a session.

Sometimes thoughts, memories, or emotions connected to the work may come up between sessions. You do not need to intentionally revisit difficult memories unless this has been discussed with your therapist. If you feel overwhelmed or concerned, reach out to your therapist.

How long does EMDR take?

There is no set number of sessions. Treatment length depends on your goals, circumstances, readiness, and the experiences being addressed.

Your therapist will work with you to pace treatment appropriately and review your progress along the way.

Is EMDR Only for PTSD?

EMDR is well established for PTSD and may also be helpful for other concerns related to distressing or traumatic experiences.

Your therapist will discuss whether EMDR is appropriate for your individual needs.

You remain in control EMDR is a collaborative therapy.

You can ask:

- What are we doing and why?
- Why are we working on this memory?
- What should I expect?
- Can we slow down?
- Can we take a break?
- What if I don't feel ready?
- Can we work on something different?

You can pause anytime.

Pacing, preparation, safety, and collaboration are important parts of EMDR therapy.



A few things to remember

You don't have to tell the whole story.

EMDR generally does not require detailed retelling of the traumatic experience.

You don't have to start with your biggest trauma.

Treatment can be carefully paced and may begin with a different target.

You don't have to force yourself through distress.

Your therapist will work with you to determine an appropriate pace.

You don't have to remember everything.

You can work with what you currently remember and notice.

You are not trying to forget.

The goal is to help the experience feel more like something that happened then, rather than something that is continuing to happen now.

Questions?

Your therapist is available to answer questions about EMDR and discuss whether this approach is appropriate for your goals and current circumstances.

You do not need to decide everything before you begin.

EMDR is a process, and your treatment plan can be adjusted as your needs become clearer.