

Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing [EMDR]

A gentle introduction to the process

Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing [EMDR] is a therapy that supports your mind and body to process experiences that may feel stuck or unresolved.

At times, past experiences [particularly those that are emotionally charged] can continue to shape how you feel, think, and respond in the present – even when part of you knows things are different now.

EMDR works with your brain's natural capacity to heal and update these experiences with adaptive learning, so they can be held with more ease, perspective, and flexibility.

During EMDR, we use a structured approach alongside bilateral stimulation [such as eye movements, audio, or gentle tapping]. This supports your brain to process information in a way that is similar to what naturally happens during sleep, where we alternate between regular sleep and REM [rapid eye movement], helping experiences to be integrated, rather than feeling stuck or overwhelming.

You won't be asked to force anything, or to go anywhere you're not ready to go. We move at a pace that feels steady enough, together.

The EMDR session:

During an EMDR session, we gently bring a particular experience into focus – along with the thoughts, emotions, body sensations, and beliefs connected to it. You may be asked some questions to help access both the experience itself, and what you would prefer to feel or believe instead.

We then use bilateral stimulation [such as eye movements or tapping], in short sets. Between these sets, you might briefly share what you're noticing, or simply take a moment to observe internally. You're not expected to analyse or make sense of everything as it happens. Often, we simply allow the mind to "free associate" – letting thoughts, images, or sensations arise and shift in their own way. Over time, the intensity connected to the experience often begins to reduce, and it can start to feel more distant, settled, or easier to hold.

For some experiences, this may happen within one session. For others, particularly longer-standing or more complex experiences, this can unfold over multiple sessions.

As things shift, we also begin to strengthen more supportive, adaptive perspectives – and gently integrate these into your day-to-day life.

What does EMDR feel like?

Everyone's experience is different.

At times, you might notice thoughts, images, emotions, or body sensations arising and shifting. Other times, things may feel subtle, distant, or unclear. There's no "right" way for it to feel, and we trust that your mind takes us where it feels it needs to go.

You remain present and in control throughout the process, and we stay within what feels manageable for you.



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The Eight Phases of EMDR

EMDR is a structured therapy that unfolds over eight phases. Not all phases involve processing, many are about building safety, understanding, and support.

1. History Taking

We begin by getting to know you – your experiences, your relationships, and what’s been feeling difficult or getting in the way. Together, we gently explore patterns that may have developed over time – particularly in context of your attachment relationships – and how these might be shaping how you feel about yourself, others, and the world around you. At a pace that feels manageable, we begin to identify what feels important to focus on.

As part of this process, we may also complete a couple of questionnaires to help us better understand your current experiences, including trauma symptoms and any dissociative responses.

Dissociation can be a very adaptive response, especially in the context of overwhelming experiences. Gently understanding how this shows up for you helps us ensure that the work we do together feels safe, accessible, and supportive of your emotional processing.

2. Preparation

This phase is about building a sense of steadiness and support. Together, we begin to develop practices that help you feel more grounded, both within sessions and in your day-to-day life.

This might include gentle grounding or calming strategies, as well as guided imagery or visualisation exercises [such as a “safe” or “calm” place], which can offer your system a place to return to when things feel activated.

3. Assessment

We gently bring a specific memory into focus.

Often, this is part of a broader pattern, so we may take time to map out experiences that feel connected, noticing any shared themes, emotions, or beliefs that may feel “stuck” or recurring.

Together, we might identify a few key moments within this pattern, such as an earlier experience, a particularly intense or impactful moment, and something more recent that still feels activated.

As we focus on a memory, we explore the thoughts, emotions, body sensations, and beliefs connected to it – including any beliefs about yourself that may have formed at the time.

We also begin to gently identify a more supportive or adaptive belief, something that feels more aligned with how you would like to see yourself, even if it doesn’t fully feel true just yet.

4. Desensitisation

This is the main processing phase.

Using bilateral stimulation [such as eye movements or tapping], your brain begins to process the experience in a way that allows it to shift and settle over time.

You’re invited to notice whatever arises – this might be thoughts, images, emotions, or body sensations – while we stay alongside what feels manageable.

There’s no need to force anything or make sense of it as it happens.

We allow the process to unfold naturally, at a pace that feels steady enough

5. Installation

As the intensity connected to the memory begins to reduce, we gently turn toward strengthening a more supportive or adaptive belief about yourself.

This is something we identified earlier – a way of seeing yourself that feels more aligned with how you would like to feel, even if it’s still growing.

Together, we support this belief to feel more accessible and embodied.

6. Body Scan

We take a moment to check in with your body.

Sometimes, even when a memory feels resolved on a cognitive or emotional level, the body may still hold traces of tension or discomfort.

If anything remains, we gently bring attention to it and allow space for further processing, supporting a more settled, integrated experience.

7. Closure

At the end of each session, we take time to ensure you feel grounded and supported before leaving. This might involve returning to calming or grounding strategies, orienting back to the present, or simply allowing a moment to settle. Even if processing is not fully complete, we make sure you leave in a place that feels steady enough.

8. Re-evaluation

At the beginning of the next session, we gently check in on how things have settled since we last met. We might notice shifts in how the memory feels, any new insights, or anything that has come up in the meantime. From here, we decide together what feels like the next step – whether that's continuing processing, pausing, or shifting focus.

What to Expect Between Sessions

It's common for your mind and body to continue processing after a session. This might look like thoughts or memories resurfacing; emotional shifts [including relief, heaviness, or unexpected calm]; dreams or images, body sensations; moments of clarity, or things feeling a little different

Sometimes changes are noticeable, and other times they are more subtle. There's no need to track everything closely – simply noticing is enough. If you've been given a space to jot things down, you're welcome to use it, but there's no pressure. If anything feels unclear, unsettling, or significant, we can always come back to it together in session.

Common Questions

Do I have to talk about everything in detail?

No. EMDR does not require you to share every detail of your experiences for them to be processed.

Will I become overwhelmed?

You may experience emotions or body sensations, but you will be supported throughout. We work to keep things within a manageable range.

Is EMDR like hypnosis?

No. You remain present, aware, and in control the entire time.

How long does EMDR take?

This varies for each person. It depends on your experiences, goals, and what feels right for you.

Is EMDR suitable for me?

EMDR can be helpful for many experiences where the mind and body continue to respond as though something from the past is still present.

This might include:

- Single-incident trauma, such as a car accident, medical event, assault, or other distressing experience.
- Complex or developmental trauma, where difficult experiences occurred over time or within important relationships.
- Attachment wounds, including experiences of rejection, abandonment, inconsistency, emotional neglect, or feeling unseen or unsafe in relationships.
- Ongoing patterns of anxiety, shame, self-criticism, or feeling "stuck," where these responses may have roots in earlier experiences.
- Distressing memories that continue to feel emotionally or physically activating, even if they happened many years ago.

Sometimes people seek EMDR for a specific event they can clearly identify. Other times, there isn't one obvious memory. Instead, there may be recurring patterns, beliefs, or emotional responses that seem to have developed across many experiences. Both can be explored gently, together.