

# EMDR Treatment Handbook

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By now, you and I have likely discussed how EMDR can help you to adaptively move past the problem for which you are seeking treatment. I've developed this handbook to educate you about this particular technique and to orient you towards the process.

EMDR, which stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, is an innovative approach to psychotherapy that incorporates much of the wisdom of other therapies. EMDR is used within a comprehensive treatment plan to promote your recovery from identified difficulties and/or past traumas. EMDR emphasizes the development of specific skills and behaviors that you need to function healthfully in future situations.

## How does EMDR work?

No one knows how any form of psychotherapy works neurobiologically or in the brain. However, we do know that when a person is very upset or experiencing a trauma, their brain cannot process information as it does ordinarily. One moment becomes "frozen in time," and remembering that moment or others associated with it may feel as bad as going through it the first time. This is because the images, sounds, smells, and feelings haven't changed and are stuck in a "fixed" state in the brain. Such memories have a lasting negative effect that interferes with the way a person sees the world and the way they relate to other people.

EMDR seems to have a direct effect on the way that the brain processes information. Through EMDR normal information processing is resumed, so following a successful EMDR session, a person no longer relives the images, sounds, and feelings when the event is brought to mind. You still remember what happened, but it is less upsetting. The process of appears to be similar to what occurs naturally during dreaming or REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. Therefore, EMDR can be thought of as a physiologically based therapy that helps a person see disturbing material in a new and less distressing way.

## The Phases of EMDR

EMDR is a structured, accelerated form of information processing that includes an eight-phase approach and numerous procedural elements, all of which contribute to its success. I've included in this handbook a description of each phase so that you know what to expect and can begin to learn how you may support your own progress. Each phase serves a particular purpose in the therapeutic process and is essential to the successful completion of EMDR treatment. Here are the phases:

**Phase 1:** The first phase is **History-taking**, where I assess your readiness for EMDR. During this phase, I will ask you questions and gather information about the problem that brings you to seek treatment at this time, information about your family, schooling, vocation, social supports, hobbies and interests, as well as your medical, psychological, and physical development. Once enough information is gathered, we will draw up a treatment plan together and decide how we will

move forward. Please let me know if there is anything important or relevant in your history or current life that I did not ask you, and that you think I ought know.

During this phase we will discuss possible targets for EMDR processing. These include distressing memories and current situations that cause emotional distress. Other targets may include related incidents that occurred in the past.

**Phase 2:** This phase is known as the **Preparation** phase. During the second phase of treatment, we ensure that you have the resources you need to tackle your problem(s). Resources are the coping strategies we may use to soothe ourselves and handle distressing thoughts, feelings, or body sensations. If necessary, I may teach you and we may practice a variety of stress reduction techniques that you can use during and between sessions.

This phase is crucial to an excellent resolution and may last one session to as many as needed. We do this to ensure that you can handle whatever comes up for you. It is a way of winterizing your home so that when the storms come it is not a problem, because you are prepared.

During this phase I will show you how EMDR uses bilateral stimulation through eye movements, physical taps, or tones. Please feel free to ask as many questions as you would like. EMDR processing will not start until you and I are sure that you are ready.

**Phase 3:** This is the **Assessment** phase. In this phase we clarify the problem we will work on by choosing a target memory. The memory is then described further through the identification of an image that represents it, how it leaves you thinking about yourself in a negative manner (negative cognition); the emotions and sensations you experience in your body as you think about it, and how you would like to view yourself concerning the situation now (positive cognition). We teach you to measure the emotions and the positive belief about yourself so that we can judge together where you are in the process of changing your thoughts and feelings about the situation and yourself.

**Phase 4: Desensitization** is the fourth phase. Here, we use bilateral stimulation (through eye movements, taps, and/or tones) to work out the target problem and any associated material that goes along with it. When the target event and associated channels are cleared we move on to the next phase. We assess the neutralization of the targeted event through the use of two different scales: the SUDS scale (Subjective Units of Disturbance) and the VOC scale (Validity of Cognition). The SUDS helps to measure your level of discomfort and the VOC helps us evaluate how close you are to your goal. When the SUDS reaches 0 and the VOC reaches 7, we know you are ready to move on to the next phase. Sometimes, this phase moves rapidly and sometimes it moves more slowly. It depends on what you need to resolve this difficulty.

**Phase 5:** This phase is known as **Installation**. During this phase we connect your positive cognition/resource with whatever is left of the past problem so that your positive resource is formally linked.

**Phase 6:** The sixth phase is called the **Body Scan**. During this phase we look to see if any discomfort remains anywhere in your body. The body scan is yet another way for us to check in and see if all the material that is related to this problem is worked through. It is important to process all material associated with the problem to assist in putting it behind you.

**Phase 7: Closure** is the seventh phase. At the end of each session we will do a formal closing together and access one of your resources. I am interested in making sure that you feel OK before you leave. If you are having any discomfort, or feel disconnected from yourself and/or if you are unsure if that is the case or not, I want to know about it so I can help you feel better or at least be in present time and grounded before you leave my office.

It is important to know that once EMDR is begun, you have opened the door to processing material that you have been working on, and that your processing will continue in between sessions. With this in mind, I will ask you to keep a log in between sessions where you can record any interesting or unusual changes, or responses that you may have in the various

parts of your life. For instance are you behaving differently when you are presented with your problem(s) or trigger(s)? Has your mood improved? Are you engaging in new or different behaviors than you are used to? Sometimes, it might feel like you are back in the old problem. This is not cause for alarm. This is just part of the processing of the problem you are working on.

If you have any concerns or are very distressed due to material that arises in between sessions, please call me to let me know so that I can help you. You are not alone in this process.

**Phase 8:** Phase eight occurs following the EMDR session and is called **Re-evaluation**. During this phase we go over the information you have gathered in between sessions so that we can see if there is any new material we need to work on. EMDR is an excellent tool for flushing out all the material that has to do with the problem that we are targeting.

Initial EMDR processing may be directed to childhood events rather than to adult onset stressors or the identified critical incident if the client had a problematic childhood. Clients generally gain insight on their situations, the emotional distress resolves and they start to change their behaviors.

In general the length of treatment depends upon the number of traumas and the age of onset. Generally, those with single event adult onset trauma can be successfully treated in under 5 hours. Multiple trauma victims may require a longer treatment time.

## Resource Development

In this work it is important to identify and develop resources that assist you in coping with life and the problems that have brought you to seek treatment. We will discuss your resources in session together during phase two. However, in preparation for this, I encourage you to think about what are your resources and how you use them now. Use the spaces beneath the following paragraphs to record your thoughts.

In the following space, list some of the positive ways that you cope with stress in your life.

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Now, let us explore some other possible resources, which we can use together and you will be able to use on your own as well.

**Safe/Comfortable Place:** Can you think of a place that is real or imagined and that feels truly comfortable or safe for you? What makes it safe or comfortable for you?

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**Support Team/People Resources:** Who are or have been the supportive people in your life? Can you remember a time that you received nurturing, guidance, or support from a family member, a teacher, a peer, or any other person who influenced you in a positive way?

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**Positive Symbols or Images as Resources:** Think of a symbol or image that helps you see, feel, and hear yourself as the "you" that you want to be. This may be your own image of yourself, an abstract symbol, archetype, or a symbol from nature that is meaningful to you.

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**Other Resources:** Add any other resources that do not fit into the categories above, but you feel are important and valuable.

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## What's Next?

As we complete the preparation phase for EMDR and we ready to move into Assessment and Desensitization, there are some things to keep in mind as you begin the process of EMDR.

**Teamwork:** The first rule of thumb is to know that we are working together to accomplish your goal. Therefore, it is important that we agree at the outset how we will work together as a team. Please discuss any concerns, difficulties or fears with me at anytime that could get in the way of our teamwork.

**Safety First:** I want you to feel safe at all times. It is important for you to know that we can stop EMDR at anytime. Together we will confirm a stop signal, which you can use when you need to stop. If material is too overwhelming, it is ok to stop and re-stabilize yourself using your resources. Often strong feelings and sensations come up while using EMDR, if you feel that it is too much, please let me know and we will work to get you more grounded. On the other hand, if you can handle what is happening, please continue.

**Be Comfortable:** Wear comfortable clothes. Be sure that where you are seated is comfortable. It is helpful to take some time to assure your comfort.

**Bilateral Stimulation:** Bilateral stimulation can occur in many ways. It is up to you and me to find the best way for you. However, please know that you are welcome to change your choice, or I might suggest it to help make the process work even better. If you want me to use faster or slower pace, or move closer or farther away, please let me know. Your comfort during this process is essential.

**Metaphors:** Often I will use a description to remind you that the Desensitization Phase is one where you just sit back and let the experience happen to you. Some people may feel that they have to control the process, but that is not true. The great thing about EMDR is that you sit back and let the process happen. It is like being on a train and watching the scenery go by, or sitting in the movies and watching a film. Some people like the idea of sitting at home and watching their VCR, knowing that they can use their pause or stop button at anytime they choose. Let me know which metaphor works best for you best, or let me know if there is one that suits you better.

**Beginning the Processing:** During the assessment phase, I will help you cue up the memory to be targeted, and in the beginning as we start I will ask you to hold onto the image, negative cognition, emotions and sensations that you have identified as associations. It is common for you to think that you must hold on to these components during the processing, but that is not the case! The image, the cognition, the feelings, and sensations all may change, and that is o.k. Let them change if that is what is happening. This is a sign that the process is moving, and that your brain is going where it needs to. Just allow yourself to sit back and let the material move itself with you as an interested spectator.

**Sharing Information:** During EMDR, I will encourage you to talk less than in other therapies. This is to keep the process moving. If there is something that you need to tell me, please do. The general principle here is that less is more. I will stop you at intervals and ask you where you are in the process. You can tell me an abbreviated version of what has happened or simply that something has changed. In fact you do not have to tell me about the content if it feels too embarrassing or for issues of confidentiality. The only reason I would need to know more is if you get stuck.

**Getting Stuck:** Getting stuck occurs when nothing is moving or the image, thought, or feelings and/or sensations keep coming up again and again. This is not unusual, let me know and we will do something to get the process moving again.

**Reality:** When you are processing information during your EMDR session, it often feels like whatever you are experiencing is happening in present time. It is not. You are safe in the office with me. During the desensitization phase I will talk to you to remind you that I am here like an anchor, keeping you grounded in the present. Sometimes, it will feel like the "the old stuff" is happening in the present, and you may find yourself feeling disheartened, this is the time that you need to let the process of EMDR move you along or ask for my assistance. **Remember, we are a team.**

## **What should I expect after my EMDR session?**

It is important to know that your brain continues to work on your problem and the related information after your EMDR session is completed. Therefore, it is helpful to note what your experience is after the session and the time that elapses until your next session. You may have new insights and/or new disturbances that come to your attention in the form of images, thoughts, affect, or sensations. This is normal. Use the log to note your experiences and bring it with you to the next session, so that we can discuss them.

If things feel to overwhelming or uncomfortable, please do not hesitate to call me. Sometimes you will be tired at the end of your EMDR session. This too is natural. When you schedule your EMDR session, you may want to plan ahead so that you have time to rest afterwards.

I hope this handbook has given you some assistance in understanding what EMDR is about and how important you are in the process. If you have any further questions, please write them down and/or ask as many as you need to ask me. It is important that you feel at ease before you start EMDR.

Information included in this treatment handbook was adapted from Marilyn Luber's 2003 "Handbook for EMDR Clients, Francine Shapiro's book, "Getting Past your Past," and from Consumer Information provided by the EMDR International Association.

For more information on EMDR you can contact the EMDR Institute ([www.emdr.com](http://www.emdr.com)) or the EMDR International Association ([www.emdria.org](http://www.emdria.org)).

