

What you need to know about EMDR



A gentle approach to healing trauma

Trauma can leave a lasting imprint on how we think, feel, and experience the world. For many people, traditional talk therapy helps, but for others, something deeper is needed to process painful memories that feel “stuck.” This is where **Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR)** comes in.

EMDR is a powerful, evidence-based therapy that helps the brain reprocess distressing experiences so they no longer feel overwhelming. While it might sound unusual at first, it has helped millions of people worldwide find relief from trauma and emotional distress.

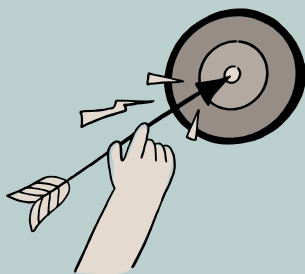


WHAT IS EMDR?

EMDR stands for **Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing**. It is a structured psychotherapy approach developed in the late 1980s by psychologist Francine Shapiro.

At its core, EMDR helps the brain process difficult memories that have not been fully “digested.” When something traumatic happens, the brain can store the memory in a raw, unprocessed form, complete with intense emotions, body sensations, and negative beliefs. During EMDR therapy, a client briefly focuses on a distressing memory while engaging in **bilateral stimulation**, typically guided eye movements, tapping, or sounds that alternate from left to right. This process helps the brain reprocess the memory so it becomes less emotionally charged and more integrated. EMDR utilises the natural healing ability of your body.

Over time, the memory doesn’t disappear, but it no longer feels as distressing or intrusive.



“EMDR therapy shows that the mind can in fact heal from psychological trauma much as the body recovers from physical trauma.” — Francine Shapiro

WHAT IS EMDR HELPFUL FOR?

EMDR is best known for treating trauma, but its applications go far beyond that. It can be helpful for a range of difficulties and the evidence base for the use is ever growing.

Some of the areas EMDR can be helpful for include:

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
- **Childhood trauma and attachment wounds**
- **Anxiety and panic attacks**
- **Depression**
- **Phobias**
- **Grief and loss**
- **Low self-esteem and negative core beliefs**
- **Performance anxiety (e.g., sports, public speaking)**

Many people seek EMDR not just for “big T” trauma (such as accidents or abuse), but also for “small t” experiences, ongoing stress, criticism, or emotional neglect, that have shaped how they see themselves



WHAT TO EXPECT FROM AN EMDR SESSION?

EMDR can be brief focused treatment or part of a longer psychotherapy programme. The sessions can be for 60 to 90 minutes.

There are **8 phases to EMDR**. After a thorough history taking and preparation for your EMDR you will have an assessment, you will be asked specific questions about a particular disturbing memory. Following this, eye movements, similar to those during REM sleep, will be recreated simply by asking you to watch the therapist's finger moving backwards and forwards across your visual field. Sometimes, a bar of moving lights (or headphones) is used instead. The eye movements will last for a short while and then stop. You will then be asked to report back on the experiences you have had during each of these sets of eye movements. Experiences during a session may include changes in thoughts, images and feelings.

With repeated sets of eye movements, the memory tends to change in such a way that it loses its painful intensity and simply becomes a neutral memory of an event in the past. Other associated memories may also heal at the same time. This linking of related memories can lead to a dramatic and rapid improvement in many aspects of your life.

During EMDR treatment, you will remain in control, fully alert and wide-awake. This is not a form of hypnosis and you can stop the process at any time. Throughout the session, the therapist will support and facilitate your own self-healing and intervene as little as possible. Reprocessing is usually experienced as something that happens spontaneously, and new connections and insights are felt to arise quite naturally from within. As a result, most people experience EMDR as being a natural and very empowering therapy.

The 8 phases aren't rushed, they are designed to ensure:

- Safety
- Stability
- Effective processing

Some people move quickly through phases, while others spend more time in preparation. Both are completely normal.

The 8 Phases of EMDR Therapy

A structured, proven approach to healing from trauma



1 HISTORY TAKING & TREATMENT PLANNING

- Explore your history and current difficulties
- Identify traumatic or distressing experiences
- Understand patterns, triggers and beliefs
- Develop a personalised treatment plan

We work together to understand your story and plan the best way forward.



2 PREPARATION

- Build safety, trust and a strong therapeutic alliance
- Learn grounding and calming techniques
- Create a 'safe place' and coping strategies
- Understand how EMDR works

We build the tools and resources you need to feel safe and supported.



3 ASSESSMENT

- Choose a target memory to work on
- Identify the negative belief (NC), positive belief (PC)
- Notice emotions, body sensations and images
- Rate the level of distress (SUDs 0–10)

We identify a specific target and establish a clear starting point.



4 DESENSITISATION

- Focus on the memory while using bilateral stimulation (eye movements, taps or sounds)
- Notice whatever comes up – thoughts, feelings, images or sensations
- Distress reduces as your brain reprocesses the memory

The distress linked to the memory is reduced as it is reprocessed.



5 INSTALLATION

- Strengthen and install the positive belief (PC)
- Use bilateral stimulation to deepen this belief
- Increase feelings of confidence and empowerment

We replace the old belief with a new, healthier belief about yourself.



6 BODY SCAN

- Scan your body while holding the memory and the positive belief in mind
- Notice any remaining tension or discomfort
- Process until the body feels calm and neutral

We ensure the memory is fully processed in both your mind and body.



7 CLOSURE

- Return to a calm and grounded state
- Use relaxation or containment techniques
- Ensure you leave the session feeling stable
- Remind that processing may continue between sessions

We close each session safely and help you feel steady before you go.



8 RE-EVALUATION

- Check in at the start of the next session
- Review what came up between sessions
- Assess progress: is the memory still distressing?
- Decide whether to continue or choose a new target

We review progress and decide the next steps together.



EMDR is collaborative and paced to you. These phases ensure the process is safe, effective and tailored to your unique experience.

WHAT TO EXPECT BETWEEN EMDR SESSIONS

EMDR doesn't stop when the session ends, your brain often continues processing in the background.

Between sessions, you might notice:

- New insights or memories emerging
- Dreams related to the work
- Emotional ups and downs
- Shifts in how you think about yourself or past events
- The memories and associated memories may be on your mind more than usual

This is completely normal and often a sign that processing is continuing.

However, it can sometimes feel unsettling, especially early in therapy. That's why ongoing support and self-care are essential. Your therapist will help you to manage this using techniques such as grounding, pacing, containment strategies and self care practices.

It may be tempting to terminate your therapy early, however, trust in the process. Your therapist is with you on your journey.

EMDR is a unique and powerful therapy that works with the brain's natural ability to heal. While it can bring up difficult emotions at times, it is designed to do so in a safe, structured, and supported way.

For many people, EMDR offers something transformative: not just coping with the past, but truly **feeling free from it**.

If you're considering EMDR, speaking with a trained therapist can help you decide whether it's the right fit for you. Book a free 15-minute consultation with one of our qualified EMDR practitioner www.therapylifestyleclinic.co.uk