



EMDR

How it works and what to expect

Trauma • PTSD • Addiction • Anxiety • Bipolar disorder • Depression • Dissociative disorders • Eating disorders • Grief

What is EMDR?

Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) is a form of psychotherapy that helps survivors of trauma reprocess memories and make new connections, ultimately reducing the distress associated with the trauma.

How does EMDR work?

EMDR uses bilateral stimulation (BLS) to help the brain access and process traumatic memories and beliefs. Types of BLS include eye movements, slow and rhythmic tapping, listening to soft tones, squeezing a ball, or holding buzzers in each hand.



Phases of EMDR

1 History-taking

Share your mental health history and reason for treatment. Work to identify a distressing memory or belief to target with treatment.

2 Preparation & resourcing

Establish a “container” to keep items you’re not ready to process. Build a mental safe space and list positive sensory memories.

3 Activation & assessment

Activate the distressing memory and identify thoughts and feelings. Evaluate the levels of distress and the validity of certain beliefs.

4 Desensitization

Focus on the target memory during bilateral stimulation. Determine new targets and work until your distress level is reduced or gone.

5 Adoption/installation

Use eye movements and other forms of BLS to help adopt and strengthen the positive belief identified during the assessment stage.

6 Body scan

Assess what’s happening in your body as you revisit your traumatic memory and your new positive belief.

7 Closure

Use some of the resources learned during the preparation stage to return to a state of emotional balance and calm.

8 Reevaluation

Check on your stress levels, beliefs, and body tension. See if treatment has helped or if more work is required.