

The 8 Phases of EMDR Therapy

InsightTimer

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[EMDR Practices](#)

EMDR is a therapy that uses different forms of bilateral stimulation to help people process and reduce distress from difficult memories.

The 8 Phases at a Glance

Each phase builds on the next, moving from preparation and safety to full integration.



Phase 1: History taking

The therapist assesses readiness and develops a treatment plan—checking for unprocessed memories, screening for dissociation, and considering culture and nervous system shaping. Building trust is essential, as these sessions lay the groundwork for EMDR, fostering confidence and mapping recovery.



Phase 2: Preparation

The therapist continues to build trust while preparing for treatment. Together you develop reliable tools for self-soothing and regulation. Stabilization, containment, safety, and coping are vital during and between sessions.



Phase 3: Assessment

Brief by design to “light up” memory components. You identify target memories and rate them with Subjective Units of Disturbance Scale (SUDS) as well as the Validity of Cognition (VOC). The therapist helps identify the image, negative belief, emotions, and body sensations. Most move quickly to desensitization—there’s no need to parse for meaning or dwell on content.



Phase 4: Desensitization

Using dual-attention bilateral stimulation, you focus on the target while accessing positive memory networks. The therapist tracks your nervous system (window of tolerance) and works until SUDS reach 0 or an appropriate level.



Phase 5: Installation

You hold the target memory with a new positive belief while engaging in bilateral stimulation. The therapist assesses VOC and strengthens healing.



Phase 6: Body Scan

You process any residual body sensations with bilateral stimulation, lowering distress and deepening the positive effects until you feel balanced.



Phase 7: Closure

The clinician works with you to help you leave the session in a state of calm in the present moment. Ideally you leave grounded, using resourcing and grounding. You may be asked to note dreams, journal, or use self-calming skills from Phase 2. Sometimes the clinician pauses and helps you feel contained.



Phase 8: Reevaluation

The next session begins here: review progress and course-correct as needed. The therapist checks distress levels, builds on prior work, consolidates changes, confirms targets are fully processed, and updates the plan.

Further Reflection
