



EMDR Sessions and Phases

This document explains how EMDR sessions and phases work when specifically approaching distressful memories and single or complex traumatic events. These phases take place once the initial consultation has taken place and EMDR is agreed as the therapeutic approach to be offered.

If EMDR is integrated into our overall therapy sessions, then Phases 1 and 2 are likely to have already been completed.

You might find that reading this through is all a bit complicated, but don't worry as I will explain it all to you in more detail when we meet.

Phase 1 – Assessment

This first phase is an assessment session and one where I gather your personal details. We will undertake a detailed assessment and I may ask you to complete one or more assessment scoring sheets depending on your presenting issues. The purpose of gathering this information is for me to gain a full picture of what has happened in your life, how you are now and what goals you want for therapy.

From this we will build a 'treatment plan'. We will identify and clarify potential targets for EMDR. A target may be a disturbing issue, event, feeling or memory for use as an initial focus for EMDR. Negative beliefs are also identified, e.g. "I can't trust people" or "I can't protect myself".

This assessment may take more than one session if there is a lot of information to gather.

Phase 2 – Preparation

I will share some specific techniques to help you deal with any emotional disturbance that may arise during or after a session and we will work together so that you can show me you can use these techniques on your own when needed, e.g. using a safe/calm place exercise.

It is important for us to be confident that you can regulate your emotions outside of Sessions, as an important goal of EMDR therapy is to make sure that you can care for yourself.

I will explain the EMDR theory, how it is done, and what you can expect during and after our session. You can view a 'How EMDR Works' video here – [click here](#) (along with some other helpful videos).

We will test out different ways of applying the bilateral stimulation (BLS) which is traditionally eye movement, but could also be me tapping your knees (or the backs of your hands on your knees) or self-butterfly tapping. The butterfly tapping is mostly used if we are working together online.

If we are working online then we'll talk about your device setup and your position in front of your camera. It is important that I can see to top half of your body as well as your face, as I will be looking at your tapping and your breathing, for example.

For clients with complex trauma/PTSD this preparation phase may take a number of sessions and we may return to this phase if needed during therapy.

Phases 3-7 – Assessment, Desensitisation, Installation, Body Scan, De-briefing

Whilst these phases can be completed together in one session, focussing on one particular target memory, it is often not possible to complete them in this short space of time and so we will likely need to continue in the next session, or multiple sessions. Sometimes there are a number of memory clusters and elements of memories to process, and so much of our work will be in these phases.



Phase 3 – Assessment

Prior to beginning the bilateral stimulation (BLS) a snapshot image is identified that represents the target incident or memory and the disturbance associated with it. Using that image is a way to help you focus, but we can just use the memory if the image is uncomfortable.

A negative cognition is identified - a negative statement about yourself that feels especially true when you focus on the target image.

A positive cognition is also identified - a positive statement about yourself that is preferable to the negative cognition. I will ask you to rate how true that statement feels on a scale of 1-7.

I will ask you to focus on target incident and the negative cognition and tell me what emotions you feel. I will ask you to rate how distressing these emotions are on a scale of 0-10.

Finally for this phase, I will ask you to tell me where you feel these emotions in your body.

Phase 4 – Desensitisation

We now begin the process of applying the bilateral stimulation (BLS). If we are together, then this will likely be me moving my fingers and you following with your eyes. If we are online then this might be self-butterfly tapping, which I will be doing in sequence with you.

I will ask you to focus simultaneously on the memory/image, the negative cognition, and the disturbing emotion or body sensation – then we will start a set of rapid BLS movements.

After a set of eye movements I will ask you what is coming up for you. I will ask you to '*notice that*' or '*go with that*' and then we start a new set of rapid BLS movements. We repeat this many times during a session.

Sometimes I might invite you to focus on the original target memory or on some other image, thought, feeling, fantasy, physical sensation, or memory. We might change the type of BLS movement if things appear stuck. From time to time I may ask you a question or query your current level of distress and if you are ok to continue.

We continue the BLS sets and when you start to tell me that something has changed in a positive sense or nothing new is coming up for you I will ask you to re-rate your emotions/distress associated with your incident. When you score the level of distress at 0 on the scale, then this phase is complete.

It is very common for us to spend multiple weeks in this phase processing a single complex memories or traumatic events.

Phase 5 – Installation

I will ask you about the positive cognition, if it is still valid. We can note a new/better one if relevant as after phase 4 is complete, your view of the event/image may have changed dramatically. I will then ask you to focus on the original incident and the positive cognition and once again, rate how true the positive cognition is on a scale of 1-7. A new set of BLS will be carried out until you are rating the positive cognition at 6 or 7.

Phase 6 – Body Scan

I will ask you to concentrate on the incident and the positive cognition and mentally scan your body and tell me if you feel anything. Further sets of BLS will be applied as needed.



Phase 7 – Debriefing

I will give you further information and support, as needed before we complete the session.

Phase 8 – Re-evaluation

At the beginning of our next session, we will review your week, discussing any new sensations or experiences that may have arisen for you. The level of disturbance arising from the experiences targeted in the previous session will be assessed and if necessary further Phases 3-7 will be undertaken. It is necessary to ensure that the processing of all relevant historical events has been completed and therefore, we might choose further events to process through Phases 3-7.

Once we have processed past memories, we will assess current triggers in the present and potentially any future worries – all still associated with the initial incident.