



Untold Story Counseling Services

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Understanding EMDR Therapy

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

"Healing is not about forgetting what happened. It is about helping your brain recognize that what happened is in the past so you can live more fully in the present."

What Is EMDR?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is an evidence-based psychotherapy approach that helps the brain process distressing memories and experiences that continue to affect how you think, feel, and respond today.

When we experience something overwhelming, our brain normally stores the memory so it becomes part of our life story. However, traumatic or highly stressful experiences can sometimes become "stuck." Instead of feeling like something that happened in the past, the memory may continue to trigger intense emotions, negative beliefs, physical sensations, or survival responses.

EMDR helps the brain resume its natural healing process by allowing these memories to be reprocessed in a way that reduces their emotional intensity while preserving the memory itself.

Unlike many traditional talk therapies, EMDR does not require you to repeatedly describe every detail of your traumatic experiences. The focus is on helping your brain process the experience rather than reliving it.

What Can EMDR Help With?

EMDR was originally developed to treat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Today, extensive research supports its effectiveness for many additional concerns.

EMDR may be helpful for:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| • Trauma and PTSD | • Panic attacks | • Low self-esteem |
| • Childhood abuse or neglect | • Depression | • Negative self-beliefs |
| • Sexual assault | • Medical trauma | • Distressing life experiences that continue to affect daily functioning |
| • Grief and loss | • Chronic stress | |
| • Anxiety disorders | • Phobias | |
| | • Performance anxiety | |

Your therapist will help determine whether EMDR is an appropriate treatment based on your goals, symptoms, and current level of stability.

How Does EMDR Work?

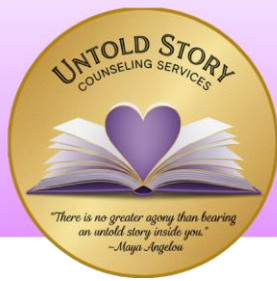
EMDR uses **bilateral stimulation**, which simply means engaging both sides of the brain in a rhythmic pattern.

This may include:

- Eye movements
- Alternating taps
- Alternating sounds through headphones

While using bilateral stimulation, you briefly focus on a memory, thought, feeling, or body sensation. Your brain naturally begins making new connections and organizing the experience in a healthier way. Many people describe it as finally allowing their brain to "finish processing" something that had remained unresolved.

The Eight Phases of EMDR Therapy



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EMDR follows a structured treatment approach designed to support both safety and healing.

Phase 1: History Taking & Treatment Planning

Purpose

To understand your story and identify treatment goals.

During this phase, your therapist gathers information about your current concerns, personal history, strengths, coping skills, and treatment goals. Together, you identify memories or experiences that may be contributing to your current difficulties.

What You Can Expect

- Getting to know your therapist
- Discussing your goals
- Identifying target memories
- Determining whether EMDR is appropriate for you

No trauma processing occurs during this phase.

Phase 2: Preparation

Purpose

To help you feel safe, supported, and prepared.

Before beginning memory processing, your therapist will teach skills to help regulate emotions and calm your nervous system. These tools help you remain grounded during and between sessions.

What You Can Expect

You may learn:

- Grounding exercises
- Relaxation techniques
- Mindfulness skills
- Safe or calm place visualization
- Emotional regulation strategies

This phase continues until both you and your therapist feel you are ready to move forward.

Phase 3: Assessment

Purpose

To identify exactly what will be processed.

During this phase, you and your therapist identify:

- The target memory
- A negative belief connected to that memory
- A healthier belief you would like to believe instead
- Emotions connected to the memory
- Physical sensations associated with it
- The current level of distress

This provides a starting point for processing.

Phase 4: Desensitization

Purpose

To reduce the emotional distress connected to the memory.

Using bilateral stimulation, you briefly focus on the memory while allowing your brain to process naturally. Your therapist periodically checks in while your brain continues making new associations. Many people notice thoughts, emotions, memories, or insights changing during this process.



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Phase 5: Installation

Purpose

To strengthen healthier beliefs.

Once distress has significantly decreased, attention shifts toward reinforcing a more adaptive belief.

Examples include:

- "I am safe."
- "I am enough."
- "I did the best I could."
- "I am in control now."

The goal is not simply reducing distress but increasing confidence and emotional resilience.

Phase 6: Body Scan

Purpose

To identify any remaining physical distress.

Traumatic experiences often affect the body as well as the mind. During the body scan, you notice any lingering tension, discomfort, or activation while thinking about the memory.

If needed, additional processing occurs until your body feels calmer.

Phase 7: Closure

Purpose

To help you leave the session feeling grounded.

Every EMDR session ends with time to help you return to a calm and stable state.

If processing is not complete, your therapist will help you use grounding skills so you feel prepared before leaving.

Phase 8: Reevaluation

Purpose

To review progress and determine next steps.

At the beginning of future sessions, you and your therapist review previously processed memories and evaluate your progress.

If additional work is needed, you decide together how to continue treatment.

What Might I Experience?

Everyone experiences EMDR differently.

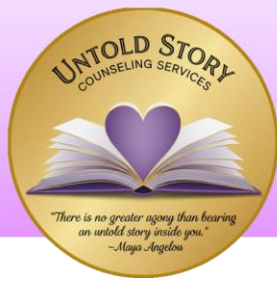
Some people notice:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| ✓ Reduced emotional distress | ✓ Increased confidence |
| ✓ Improved sleep | ✓ New insights or perspectives |
| ✓ Feeling lighter or calmer | ✓ Less reactivity to reminders of the past |
| ✓ Greater self-compassion | |

Others notice dreams, emotions, or memories surfacing between sessions. This is often a normal part of the brain's continued processing and can be discussed during therapy.

Common Questions

Will EMDR make me forget what happened?



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No.

EMDR does not erase memories. Instead, it reduces the emotional intensity connected to them so they feel more like something that happened in the past rather than something happening in the present.

Will I lose control?

No.

You remain awake, aware, and in control throughout the entire session.

You may stop, pause, or ask questions at any time.

Do I have to tell every detail of my trauma?

No.

Although some discussion of the memory is necessary, EMDR does not require you to repeatedly describe every detail of what happened.

Your therapist will never pressure you to share more than you feel ready to discuss.

Is EMDR hypnosis?

No.

EMDR is not hypnosis.

You remain fully conscious, aware of your surroundings, and actively involved throughout treatment.

Is EMDR Right for Everyone?

Although EMDR is highly effective for many people, it is not appropriate for every person or every stage of treatment.

Some individuals benefit from spending time developing coping skills, improving emotional regulation, or increasing overall stability before beginning trauma processing.

Your therapist will work collaboratively with you to determine the treatment approach that best supports your goals and well-being.

How Can I Prepare for EMDR?

You can support your therapy by:

- Getting adequate sleep before sessions
- Eating and staying hydrated
- Practicing grounding skills between appointments
- Writing down thoughts or emotions that arise between sessions
- Communicating openly with your therapist about your experiences

Healing is not about moving quickly. It is about moving safely.

What EMDR Is Not

EMDR **does not**:

- Erase memories
- Change historical facts
- Force you to relive traumatic events
- Require you to share every detail
- Work like hypnosis or mind control
- Take away your ability to stop or pause treatment

EMDR is a collaborative therapy that moves at a pace that feels manageable for you.

The Goal of EMDR



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The goal of EMDR is not to change your past.

The goal is to change how your past continues to affect your present.

As distress decreases, many people experience greater emotional freedom, healthier relationships, increased confidence, and a stronger sense of safety. Memories often become less overwhelming, allowing you to respond to life based on who you are today rather than what happened to you in the past.

Questions?

If you have questions about EMDR or whether it may be an appropriate treatment for you, please discuss them with your therapist. Together, you can determine the approach that best supports your healing and your goals.

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Helping you become the main character in your story, not the experiences that have shaped it

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