

EMDR

The 8-phase Protocol

When people think of EMDR, they often think of just the part which involves eye movements. However, EMDR is a complete therapy, involving all of the 8 phases below. It is important to understand that all of these phases are necessary to ensure your safety and maximise the effectiveness of the work.

Phase 1 - History and Treatment Planning

Phase 1 may take between 2 and 4 sessions. Firstly you will be asked to complete some psychometric tests so that I can better understand how you are affected by your trauma. These tests also provide a benchmark against which we can measure your progress during and after treatment. I will then ask you what you want to work on with EMDR, with a view to understanding what symptomatic improvements would make the most difference to your life. In order to develop a treatment plan, I will need to understand your history and the context in which your symptoms developed. I will ask you for an overview of your background and for key significant negative life events. So that you do not find this process too upsetting, it is best that you don't talk about these events in detail - headlines are sufficient. From your history, we will agree on a treatment plan, which involves identifying memories and associated negative self-beliefs which relate to the symptoms you want to resolve.

Phase 2 - Preparation

In this phase, I will teach you some techniques to help you deal with any difficult feelings that may arise during or after a session. Self-care is an important part of any therapy, and I will want to make sure that you are able to use these techniques before we move onto the next phase of EMDR. For some people this takes just one session, whilst for others it will take a much longer period of time. Also during this phase, I will give you an idea of how EMDR works, and of what you can expect during and after reprocessing.

Phase 3 - Assessment

Once we are both happy that you are sufficiently prepared, we will begin to work on the targets identified in Phase 1. I will ask you to identify an image that represents the target and the disturbing feelings and body sensations associated with it. Once an image has come to mind, I will ask you what negative belief about yourself feels particularly true when you focus on that image. A negative belief may be something like: “I’m not safe” or “I’m worthless”. You will also be asked to provide a positive belief which you would prefer to have instead when you bring up the image. A positive belief might be “I’m safe now” or “I am ok as I am”.

Phase 4 - Desensitisation

I will ask you to focus simultaneously on the image, the negative belief and the disturbing emotion or body sensation, then to follow a light or an object from side to side with your eyes. After a while, I will pause the eye movements and will ask you to report briefly on what has come up; this may be a thought, a feeling, a physical sensation, an image, a memory or a change in any one of the above. We will not engage in discussion at this point, but will continue with eye movements until no more change is happening. We will then return to the target memory and I will ask you what you notice now. Often a different element of the memory will surface, which we will process with eye movements as before. This process continues until the memory no longer feels distressing.

Phase 5 - Installation

I will remind you of the preferred positive belief you stated in Phase 3 and will ask you if that still feels like the right positive belief. Often a different positive belief feels more relevant now. I will then ask you to hold the preferred positive belief together with the target memory, whilst doing some more eye movements.

Phase 6 - Body Scan

Once the positive belief feels solid, I will ask you to scan your body whilst focusing on the positive belief and target memory. If you feel any sensations, whether pleasant or unpleasant, I will ask you to do some more eye movements.

Phase 7 - Debriefing

You will be given further information regarding what to expect after the session and will be reminded to continue to use the exercises you were taught in Phase 2.

Phase 8 - Re-evaluation

At the beginning of the next session, we will review your week, discussing any new sensations or experiences and any changes you have noticed. The level of disturbance arising from the experiences targeted in the previous session is assessed.