

EMDR Therapy Explained

A gentle, evidence-based path toward healing, integration, and emotional freedom

What Is EMDR?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is a structured, research-supported psychotherapy approach designed to help people process and heal from distressing experiences. At its core, EMDR works with the brain's natural ability to heal. When something overwhelming happens—whether a single event or repeated experiences—the nervous system can become “stuck.” Instead of the experience being processed and integrated, it remains active in the body and mind, often showing up as anxiety, reactivity, disconnection, or patterns that feel difficult to change. EMDR helps the brain do what it was originally meant to do: process, integrate, and release what no longer needs to be held.

How EMDR Works

EMDR uses bilateral stimulation—most commonly guided eye movements, tapping, or auditory tones—to activate both sides of the brain while recalling aspects of a distressing memory. This process allows the memory to shift from being:

- emotionally charged
- physically activating
- present-day reactive

...to becoming:

- integrated
- less distressing
- part of your past rather than something you are reliving

Over time, the emotional intensity decreases, new insights often emerge, and the body no longer responds as though the experience is still happening. Many clients describe this as:

- “It feels more distant now”
- “I understand it differently”
- “It no longer has the same charge”

What Happens in an EMDR Session

EMDR is a structured process, but always guided by your pace, your readiness, and your nervous system.

1. Preparation & Resourcing

Before processing begins, we focus on creating safety and stability. You will learn grounding tools, nervous system regulation strategies, and internal resources that help you feel supported throughout the work. This phase is essential—it ensures that you are not overwhelmed and that your system feels anchored.

2. Identifying the Target

We identify a specific memory, experience, or pattern to work on. This may include:

- an image or moment
- emotions connected to it
- body sensations
- beliefs about yourself (for example: “I am not safe” or “I am not enough”)

3. Reprocessing (The Core of EMDR)

While briefly bringing the memory to mind, you will follow bilateral stimulation (eye movements, tapping, or tones). You are not analyzing or forcing anything. Instead, you are allowing your brain to process naturally—often moving through thoughts, images, emotions, and sensations in a way that feels surprisingly organic. You remain aware, present, and in control throughout the process.

4. Integration & Closure

As the memory becomes less distressing, we strengthen more adaptive, supportive beliefs (such as “I am safe now” or “I have choice”). We also ensure that you leave the session feeling grounded and regulated.

What EMDR Can Help With

EMDR is widely used for trauma, but its applications extend far beyond what many people expect.

Trauma & Stress

- Single-incident trauma (accidents, medical events, loss)
- Childhood experiences
- Complex or relational trauma

Anxiety & Emotional Distress

- Generalized anxiety

- Panic
- Chronic stress
- Emotional overwhelm

Attachment & Relationship Patterns

- Fear of abandonment or rejection
- Difficulty trusting
- Repeating relationship dynamics

Self-Worth & Identity

- Negative core beliefs (“I am not enough,” “I am too much”)
- Shame
- Perfectionism

Intimacy & Sexual Well-Being

- Sexual trauma
- Disconnection from desire
- Body-based anxiety or shutdown
- Difficulty feeling safe, present, or open

Life Transitions & Performance

- Burnout
- Grief and loss
- Medical experiences
- Performance anxiety

What EMDR Feels Like

Every person’s experience is unique, but EMDR is not about reliving trauma. It is about processing it differently. Clients often describe sessions as:

- focused but not overwhelming
- surprising in what arises
- deeply relieving over time

You are always in control of the pace. We move in a way that respects your nervous system—not pushes past it.

A Different Way of Healing

EMDR is not about endlessly talking through the past. It is about helping your mind and body complete what was left unfinished—so you can move forward with greater ease, clarity, and connection.

Closing Reflection

Healing is not about erasing what happened. It is about changing how it lives inside of you. EMDR offers a way to release what has been held—sometimes for years—and to reconnect with a sense of safety, choice, and possibility.

Disclaimer

This resource is intended for educational purposes only and does not replace psychotherapy, diagnosis, or medical care. Reading this material does not establish a therapeutic relationship. EMDR should be conducted by a trained and licensed clinician. If you are experiencing significant distress, please seek support from a qualified mental health professional.

Copyright © 2026. Dr. Tiffany Stanley, Ph.D., LPC-S, MA, ABS, CST. Tiffany Stanley Therapy. All Rights Reserved.



