



FAMILY RESOURCE

A GUIDE TO
**EYE MOVEMENT
DESENSITISATION AND
REPROCESSING (EMDR)
THERAPY**



Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy addresses the psychological and physiological symptoms coming from difficult life experiences. EMDR is not just for trauma; it can be used for a range of problems.

Birth-related trauma can be defined as any trauma or injury, whether physical or psychological, sustained at any time in connection with pregnancy, labour and birth.

Many women experience trauma symptoms following a difficult or distressing birth. Non-birthing parents, support people, and birth workers can also experience trauma symptoms. Trauma symptoms are a normal and understandable response to experiencing unusual and highly distressing events.

Birth-related trauma can affect women in a variety of ways, some of which may include:

- Intrusive thoughts, images and nightmares about events connected to the birth.
- Distress is associated with reminders of the birth.
- Avoidance of feared situations.
- Problems connecting with or enjoying their baby.
- Hypervigilance with health and safety.
- Self-blame, feeling inadequate as a mother, feeling as though their body has failed.
- Increased distress and feelings of inadequacy around sleep and settling.
- Fears around intimacy and/or incontinence.
- Anxiety around a current or future pregnancy and birth.

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What is EMDR?

Memories of stressful and traumatic experiences can be stored in the brain with vivid pictures, sounds, thoughts, feelings and body sensations. EMDR reactivates these different parts of disturbing memories, allowing the brain to reprocess the experience. The bilateral stimulation (the process of alternately stimulating the left and right sides of your brain) used in EMDR therapy helps the brain reprocess the way information is stored.



It is your brain's own ability to heal that does all the work, and you are in control. With reprocessing, memories tend to fade until they are no longer disturbing. After reprocessing is complete, they will be just the story of what happened without the distress. The goal is to reduce the emotional intensity and including new, more helpful beliefs.

How does it work?

The exact reason for EMDR's effectiveness is not fully understood, but it is thought that the bilateral stimulation creates a demand on the person's working memory. When you activate the memory while doing the bilateral stimulation at the same time this means that your working memory must process a lot of information at the same time, therefore 'overloading' your working memory.

As a result of all of this, three things usually happen.

1. The memory becomes more distant.
2. Emotional distress is reduced.
3. New, adaptive information emerges.
4. Connections begin to form between the emotional and logical parts of the brain, creating a shift in your perspective of the memory. This shift leads to the memory having a less negative impact on you.

As you engage in EMDR therapy and gradually work through memories or issues, you can expect a decrease in trauma symptoms. At the same time, flexible and more positive thought patterns are likely to emerge, leading to a change in your reactions and behaviour. These lasting and meaningful changes happen from dealing with issues at a deeper level rather than only symptom management.

How long does the process take?

EMDR can work fairly quickly; a typical course of therapy for someone with a single trauma can be around 3-7 sessions without homework. On the other hand, complex trauma typically requires longer-term therapy.

The amount of time it will take to complete EMDR therapy will depend upon your history and treatment goals.

People often think EMDR is just bilateral stimulation (phase 4); however, EMDR involves working through 8 specific phases as outlined in the diagram.

Although EMDR therapy may produce results quicker than other forms of therapy, speed is not the goal of therapy, and it is important to remember that every person has different needs.

The 8 Stages of EMDR Therapy



Five tips for choosing the right therapist

1 Ask someone you trust.

While everyone is different with their own set of needs, a referral suggestion from someone you trust can often be a good option.

2 Get familiar with the different types of therapists and what they each do.

For example, look at the differences between psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and counsellors to see which will suit your needs the best.

3 Supporting inclusion and diversity

Look for inclusive services and support that are culturally informed, reach out to local community leaders if you feel comfortable doing so.

4 Make sure the fit is right, there are lots of support services to choose from

Call or send an email and ask them questions. Describe what you are looking for and ask whether they have competencies in that area.

5 It's ok to move on

If, after a couple of sessions, it feels like it will not work for you, move on and try someone else. It is okay to shop around.

"EMDR was the turning point of my healing. It allowed me to create space from my birth story. I can still recall the events, but no longer in a way that it's happening to me over and over again daily. My story now sits alongside me, not at the forefront of every move I make."

"I have been diagnosed with PTSD, anxiety, and depression, which we are addressing via EMDR therapy and relaxation techniques. I wish I had identified the specific trauma-informed support I needed earlier, as I wasted so much time feeling like I was doing something wrong." - Andrew

"The best part is you don't need to share all the details with someone. You think about the memory and follow their fingers with your eyes so you can keep things private and still have results, and relatively quickly, too. Three months into EMDR, and I can finally feel me again and not be consumed with my birth trauma."

Research in support of EMDR effectiveness

EMDR therapy is a thoroughly researched, effective psychotherapy method proven to help people recover from trauma and PTSD symptoms. It is recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). EMDR has been shown to reduce trauma symptoms effectively and is the most cost-effective trauma therapy. Not only is EMDR highly effective, it has also been shown to maintain gains and even continue to show improvements at six months follow up. Research studies can be found [here](#).

Where can I find an EMDR specialist to help me?

The EMDR Association of Australia provides a list of therapists trained in EMDR.

EMDRAA members must have completed a minimum of 50 hours of training, including:

- 20 hours of EMDRAA-approved training.
- 20 hours of practice.
- 10 hours of consultation with an EMDRAA-approved consultant.



This treatment could potentially impact your recollection of events and the accuracy of your memory. If you have a claim for birth trauma injury / medical negligence relating to your birth, EMDR might impact your ability to recall the relevant events surrounding your claim and/or your ability to give evidence.

We recommend that you consult with your medical team for medical advice; if you have a potential medical negligence claim and EMDR is recommended, we recommend that you consult with a lawyer prior to commencing EMDR treatment. This will allow the lawyer to ensure that they manage the risks of EMDR to your claim before you commence the treatment (for example, by taking a detailed and early statement from you about your birth and arranging any urgent.



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