



The Wellness Consultancy

Preparing for EMDR therapy

The initial stages of EMDR therapy focus on exploring in detail your difficulties (assessment stage), then on how you ground yourself, keep safe and what coping mechanisms you use (resourcing stage). Understanding how you respond and developing kindness to your symptoms and difficulties is a large part of trauma therapy.

The leaflet below is a brief explanation of trauma:

<https://emdrassociation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Understanding-trauma-leaflet-for-Adults-Adolescents.pdf>

At the first appointment, I will ask you to complete 2 questionnaires - one looks at a variety of symptoms typical of trauma such as having flashbacks /nightmares / intrusive thoughts <https://www.emdrresearchfoundation.org/toolkit/pcl-5-criterion-a.pdf>; the other is a questionnaire on dissociation which is a common difficulty for people experiencing trauma, depression and anxiety:

<http://traumadissociation.com/downloads/information/dissociativeexperiencescale-ii.pdf>.

When we feel overwhelmed our survival system often causes us to disengage from situations to protect us. If you'd like to understand more about dissociation the link below explains this:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dissociative-disorders/>

There is no need for you to complete these questionnaires in advance of the appointment but sometimes clients find it helpful to look at what we will cover in advance to reduce anxiety. It can be better to complete these together so we can explore anything that comes up as sometimes this can be triggering. Clients often worry that they will have to go into past memories straightaway which can be overwhelming so understanding that this part of the therapy comes later on can help. As with all therapy, I go at your pace and we agree the plan of treatment, goals and priorities together. The trauma questionnaire (PCL-5) is something we will complete again at the

review and end stages of therapy and this can be a positive way of objectively reviewing progress.

Please think about the various ways in which you help yourself cope with difficult feelings and thoughts which we will build upon. It could be that this is an area which would benefit from more work and the time taken for this stage of therapy varies for each person. Being well resourced and able to function with day to day life better is vital to help with our psychological stability and emotional resilience. This is a large part of the recovery journey. Until we have established healthy ways of coping with emotions and thoughts, we won't begin detailed exploration or processing of past traumatic memories which are still active today. This link explains the 8 stages of EMDR therapy.

<https://emdrhealing.com/what-is-the-emdr-process-the-8-phases-explained/>

In summary, in advance of the session I would ask that you:

- Review the therapy contract
- Consider the ways that you cope and support yourself - people, activities, environments. Things that help calm, soothe and distract you from distressing emotions and thoughts eg a pet, walking, talking to a supportive friend
- Consider a place real or imagined that you would like to connect with on a daily basis to help you feel calm and relaxed. This can be a real place you have been to, would like to visit or even imagine such as the moon. It is often better not to have people in our calm place just in case this causes us some conflict in the future. We will connect this relaxing place with a helpful breathing technique that calms the body's threat system and this will be something that is practiced daily
- Consider 5 positive memories (as per the separate handout) - you can complete this in advance if you wish or just note down thoughts

Rachel Wesley

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