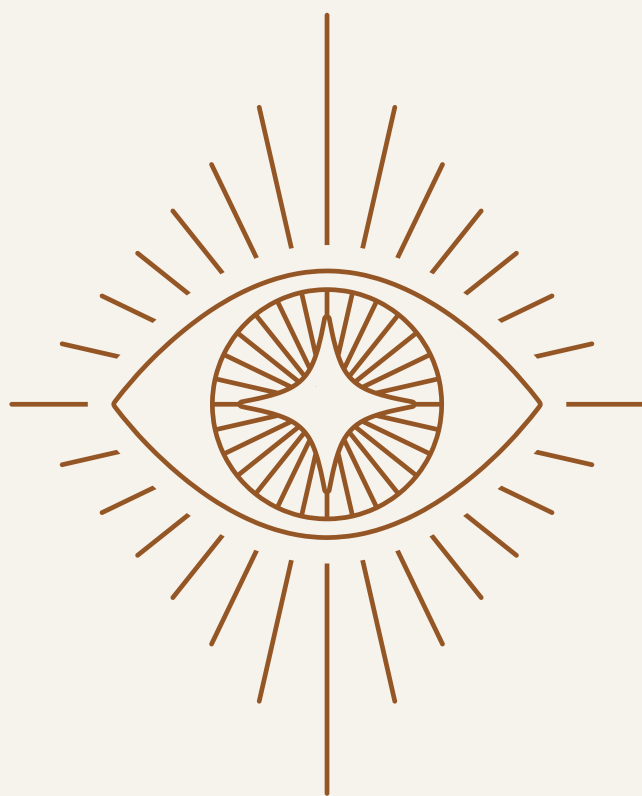


# EMDR PREPARATION



CLAUDIA WOLF

# PREPARING FOR EMDR THERAPY

Welcome to my 'preparing for EMDR' booklet. You have probably downloaded this because you are considering, or about to start, EMDR therapy.

It is normal to be nervous, worry if you are 'doing it right' or even concerned that it will not work on you.

It is important to choose a provider with whom you feel comfortable, safe and authentic with- the right 'vibe'.

Many therapists that are trained in EMDR therapy will also use other therapies alongside your treatment. Some of my favourite combinations are parts work, Schema Therapy, Acceptance Commitment Therapy, Internal Family Systems, psycho-education, or Resource Therapy.

This can enhance your EMDR therapy experience, ensuring it is tailored for you and your needs, and provide a range of options for when you are not doing active EMDR processing.



I am Claudia Wolf, EMDRAA Accredited EMDR Therapist, Advanced Clinical Resource Therapist (Parts Work), and Accredited Mental Health Social Worker. I developed this book to support therapists and their clients to prepare for EMDR therapy. In my own practice, I use an integrative form of EMDR, but have developed this resource to address a traditional EMDR therapy model. It is based on current research and my clinical experience, and should not be a replacement for therapy or therapeutic informed consent.

# WHAT IS EMDR THERAPY?

EMDR therapy was developed by Dr Francine Shapiro in 1987 and is now firmly established as a leading trauma therapy and treatment for mood disorders, anxiety, pain, performance and grief.

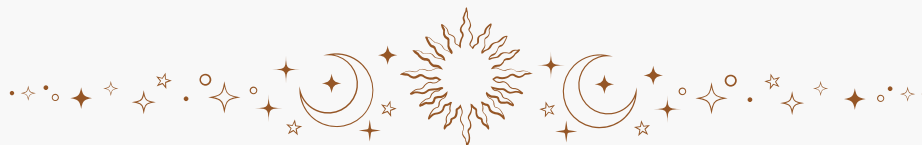
It is an 8 phase therapy which includes stages for planning, emotional preparation, reducing distress of old traumas, & supporting you to make new positive beliefs.

Any number of the 8 phases can be achieved within the one therapy session, depending on context. There is an ongoing process of assessing and developing readiness for the processing stages of EMDR.

EMDR is endorsed by Medicare Australia as a Focussed Psychological Strategy, and the World Health Organisation. It treats symptoms, rather than targeting diagnoses, and has shown excellent efficacy in PTSD studies, for symptom relief and resolution.

EMDR utilises 'bilateral stimulation' and in your sessions you will likely utilise left-right eye movements, self-administered tapping on the body, or holding 'buzzies'.

Sometimes you will be offered the alternative to keep your eyes closed and use tapping on your body. This can be useful for neurodivergent presentations like ADHD, or if you are prone to migraines or similar.



# HOW DOES EMDR WORK?

EMDR helps the brain reprocess “stuck” memories so they stop triggering present-day distress. It uses bilateral stimulation- alternating left and right motions- to support memory processing and integration, allowing the experience to be updated and resolved. The memory isn’t erased- it’s reorganised in a safer, more adaptive way. Here are some current theories about how EMDR works and important components of EMDR therapy:

## **The AIP Model (Adaptive Information Processing):**

Shapiro’s EMDR development proposed the AIP model, which says:

- The brain naturally moves toward healing.
- Distress happens when a memory wasn’t fully processed at the time it occurred.
- This “stuck” memory holds old emotions, beliefs, and body sensations.
- When the memory is activated in EMDR, the brain reconnects it with healthier, more adaptive information- so the past can feel like the past again.

## **Working Memory and Dual Awareness:**

EMDR works in part through working memory theory, which suggests that holding a distressing image or sensation in mind while simultaneously engaging in a competing task- such as bilateral stimulation- taxes the brain’s limited working memory capacity. This reduces the vividness and emotional intensity of the memory, allowing it to be reprocessed more adaptively.



EMDR also relies on dual awareness: the client keeps one foot in the memory and one foot in present-moment safety, anchored by the therapist and the bilateral stimulation. This dual attention ensures the client is connected to the traumatic material without being overwhelmed, enabling integration rather than reactivation.

# HOW DOES EMDR WORK?

## **Memory Reconsolidation:**

Once a memory is activated, the brain enters a window where it can update that memory. EMDR uses this natural process so the memory becomes:

- less vivid and emotionally charged
- more accurately integrated
- connected to new insights, perspectives, and body states

See Bruce Ecker et al in reading list at the end of this booklet

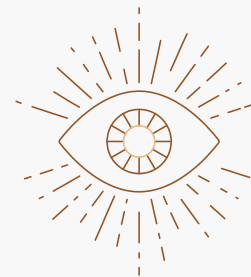
## **Eye Movements and Bilateral Stimulation:**

During EMDR, you use eye movements or another form of bilateral stimulation (tapping, tones). This activates both sides of the brain, helping:

- emotional material (typically right-hemisphere dominant)
- and logical meaning-making (typically left-hemisphere dominant) work together more fluidly.

The rhythmic left-right eye movements used in EMDR resemble those that occur in REM sleep, when the brain naturally:

- sorts experiences
- integrates information
- “files away” emotional material
- reduces the intensity of distressing memories



EMDR intentionally harnesses this mechanism while you're awake and supported, allowing targeted processing of specific memories.



# PHASES OF EMDR

## 1. History Taking & Treatment Planning

Your therapist gathers your story, identifies targets for EMDR (memories, triggers, beliefs), and ensures EMDR is appropriate and safe.

## 2. Preparation

You learn grounding skills, resourcing, and what to expect in EMDR. The goal is to build safety, stability, and trust before processing.

## 3. Assessment

You focus on one target memory and identify: the image, the negative belief about yourself, your desired positive belief, emotions, body sensations, disturbance level (often through a SUD rating /10). This sets the starting point for processing.

## 4. Desensitisation

Using bilateral stimulation (eye movements, taps, tones), your brain starts reprocessing the memory. The memory gradually becomes less vivid, less distressing, and more adaptive.

## 5. Installation

You strengthen the positive belief that now naturally fits with the memory (e.g., "I am safe," "I did the best I could"). The goal is to deepen the adaptive perspective.

## 6. Body Scan

You check your body for any leftover tension, sensations, or emotional residue linked to the memory. Any lingering activation is processed until the body feels settled.

## 7. Closure

You leave the session grounded and stable. Your therapist helps you return to the present and use coping strategies if anything feels unfinished.

## 8. Reevaluation

At the start of the next session, you review progress. Is the memory still neutral? Is anything new emerging? Then the next target is chosen or continued.

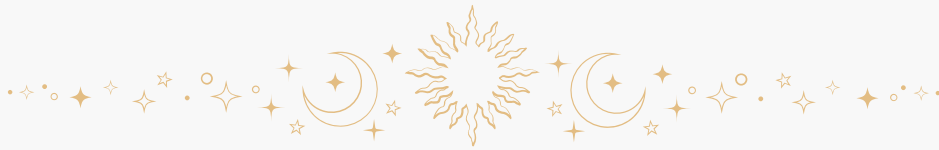
**You will move through these phases cyclically, not in a linear fashion. You may not do phase 4-7 in every session, or you may do them all within one session!**



# GOALS FOR EMDR

Take a moment to reflect on your most important areas for focus.

Try to write as if it is already happening, for example “I am regularly leaving the house and enjoying myself” instead of ‘stop having panic attacks’.



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# FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE

In your EMDR treatment plan, you will decrease the reliance on the 'old' pathways and patterns in the brain that no longer suit you, and help the parts of you (memory fragments and neural pathways) holding on to fear, rejection or pain to release the emotion.

While you are processing trauma, you also want to work with your therapist to lay the foundations for your 'new' way of being. This involves creating, building and strengthening the ways you want to feel and act. You also want to tap into your existing strengths, skills and resilience.

We call this adaptive information, and it is the key to EMDR's empowering approach. Our brain already knows how to heal, we just need to clear the blocks to this.



# PREPARING FOR CHANGE

Here are some preparation activities to help you get the most out of your EMDR therapy. If you choose to do these, you are 'front loading' the brain to access adaptive material and bring it out during your processing.

I encourage you to do this in as much detail as possible. Ideally, speak in present tense, as if you are back in the moment. Include sensory information, feelings, sensations, if you can.

It is normal for this to feel unfamiliar, or even difficult. If any of these activities feel too challenging, please be reassured that you will develop tools to support you during your EMDR sessions with your therapist.

These activities are not about wishful thinking, or a token attempt to 'think of something calm'. What we are trying to do is activate a feeling in your nervous system that is pleasant or positive in some way.

Don't feel limited to this workbook- playlists, Pinterest boards, scrapbooks, vision boards, photo collages, voice recordings, artwork are all amazing ways to complete these.



# 5 FAVOURITE MEMORIES

You can include the smallest things, people, places, activities. If you can, include some childhood memories. Maybe you received an award, went on a holiday, had a movie night with your young family, completed a huge challenge, had an awesome conversation with a friend.

*Example: I am walking along the beach in Bali in 2023. I can smell the faint smell of street food cooking nearby, and frangipanis trees bordering the sand. I feel the sand under my feet and I notice a sense of grounding. There is nowhere to be, nothing I have to do, and my body is fully relaxed. I lie down in a Hammock and it rocks gently, soothing me. It is warm but I am comfortable. I smile as I remember...*

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# PARTS OF ME

This is about learning the parts of you that you would like to see more of, or that you appreciate.

I encourage you to do this in as much detail as possible. Ideally, speak in present tense, as if you are back in one exact memory of a time this Resource was active. Include sensory information, feelings, sensations, if you can. When you have connected with this part, notice & write down what its name is. It might be Nurturing, Protective, Loving, Capable, Confident, Calm, 'Enough', Okay as I am, Grateful, Open Minded, Resilient, Managing, Reflective.

If you are having trouble, perhaps try putting on a song that connects and resonates with you. Maybe it's an uplifting, activating work out song that makes you feel strong and powerful. Or a song that invokes a sense of love and connection with a positive figure in your life. It could even be a song from a movie scene that you connect with.

*Example: I am sitting in training, my heart racing slightly with excitement. Information is flowing into me and 'clicking' over and over again. I have found a framework that articulates exactly how I feel about the topic. I feel active, alert, inspired. I feel connected to the people in the room with me, and I am almost fidgeting with eagerness to apply this new learning to my life and work. I am Engaged, Excited Learner.*

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# TRACKING THE JOURNEY

# DAILY LOG

Record here any dreams, emotions, revelations, triggers, or changes that you notice between sessions. Rate the strength/ intensity of the experience if you can, whether it is positive or unpleasant.

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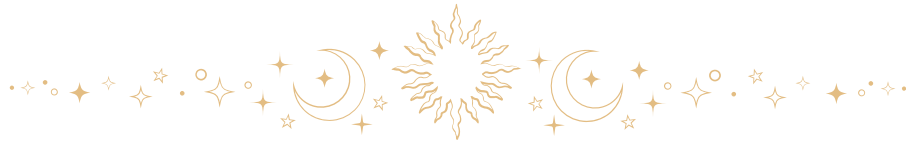
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## SYMPTOMS

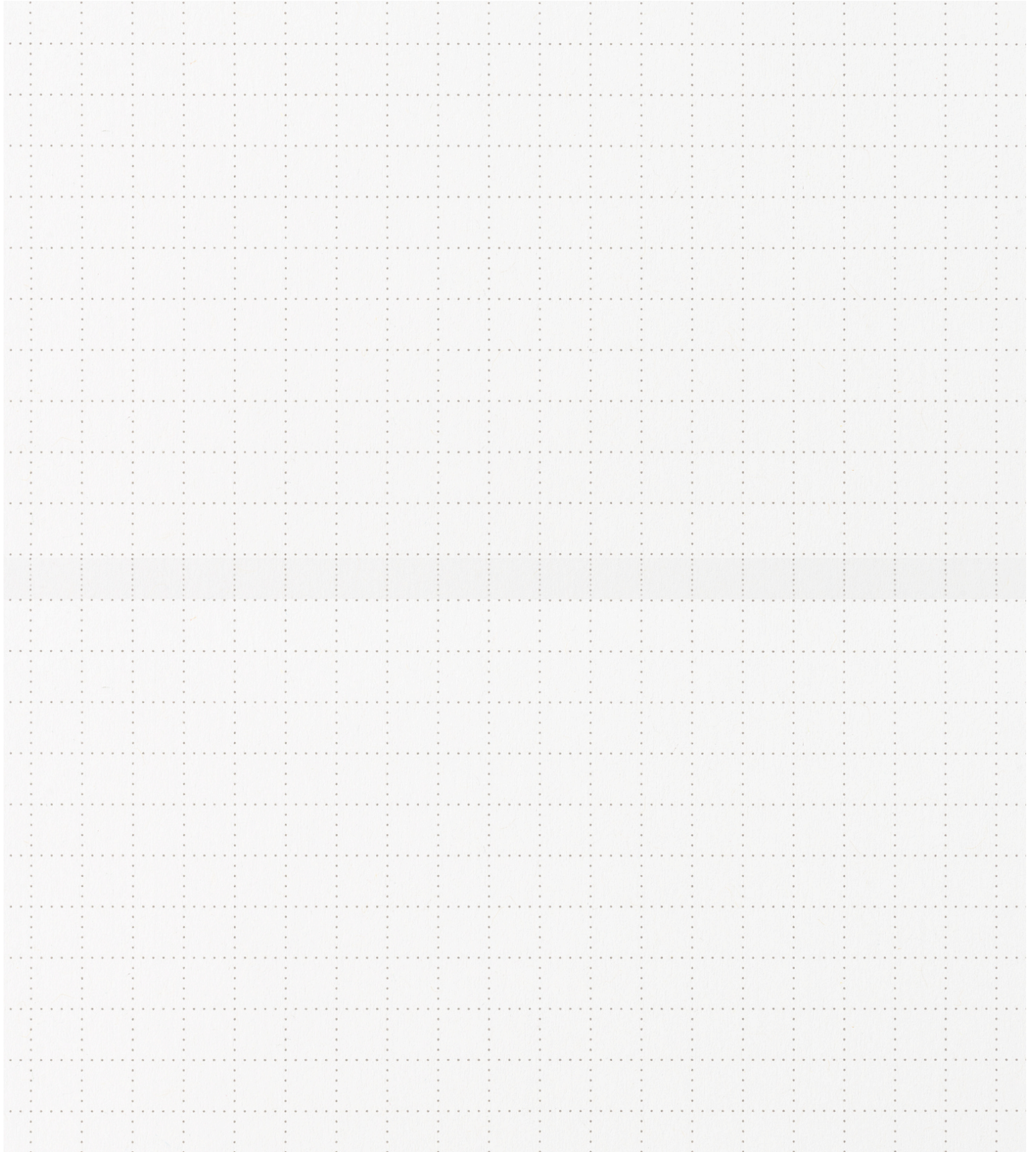
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## QUESTIONS FOR MY THERAPIST

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# DRAWING SPACE



# FURTHER READING REFERENCES

## **EMDR Association of Australia (EMDRAA)**

Clear explanations of EMDR, FAQs, therapist finder, and training pathways.  
Website: [emdraa.org](http://emdraa.org)

## **EMDR International Association (EMDRIA)**

Offers research summaries, EMDR basics, blog posts, and position papers.  
Website: [emdria.org](http://emdria.org)

## **Getting Past Your Past- Francine Shapiro**

The founder of EMDR introduces the method in a very practical way.

## **EMDR Made Simple- Jamie Marich**

Clear explanations of EMDR, trauma, dissociation, mindfulness, and preparation skills. Very accessible.

## **The Body Keeps the Score- Bessel van der Kolk**

Not an EMDR-specific book, but includes chapters describing EMDR research and mind-body trauma treatment. Highly readable.

## **Tapping In- Laurel Parnell**

Teaches resource tapping based on EMDR principles. Great for clients wanting to strengthen regulation and internal resources.

## **Every Memory Deserves Respect- Deborah Korn & Michael Baldwin**

A story-based, extremely readable introduction to EMDR written for the general public.

## **Bruce Ecker, Robin Ticic & Laurel Hulley**

Key names in making memory reconsolidation understandable for clinicians and clients who like to go deeper

