

# EMDR: A Simple Explanation

**EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)** is a therapy that helps the brain process upsetting or traumatic experiences that have not been fully resolved.

## How the Brain Normally Processes Experiences

You can think of emotional experiences in two helpful ways:

### 1. Digestion analogy

Just as your body digests food, your brain normally digests experiences. It takes them in, makes sense of them, learns from them, and then moves on.

### 2. Memory filing analogy

Your brain also works like a filing system. Once an experience is processed, it gets filed away as something that happened in the past, along with the understanding that you survived it and are safe now.

## When Experiences Get “Stuck”

Sometimes an experience is too overwhelming, happens too quickly, or occurs when we are too young or unprepared to cope. When this happens, the brain may not fully digest the experience or file it correctly.

Instead, the memory can become stuck in the nervous system with the original images, emotions, body sensations, and beliefs. When something in the present reminds you of that experience, it can feel as though it is happening again, even though it is over. This can lead to strong emotional or physical reactions that feel hard to control.

## How EMDR Helps

EMDR helps the brain restart its natural processing system so the experience can be fully digested and filed away properly.

During EMDR, the therapist uses **bilateral stimulation**, such as eye movements, alternating sounds, or gentle tapping. This stimulation helps activate the brain’s natural healing process, similar to what happens during REM (dream) sleep.

As processing occurs, the memory becomes less distressing and is stored as something that happened in the past rather than something that feels present and overwhelming.

## What to Expect in an EMDR Session

- You focus briefly on a specific upsetting memory and the thoughts, emotions, and body sensations connected to it.
- The therapist guides you through short sets of bilateral stimulation.
- Between sets, you simply notice and share what comes up.
- Over time, thoughts, images, and feelings usually shift, and distress decreases.

## **Important Things to Know**

- EMDR is **not hypnosis**. You are fully awake, aware, and in control at all times.
- You can stop the process whenever you want.
- Strong emotions may arise, but you are working with **old memories**, not present danger.
- Your own brain does the healing. The therapist's role is to guide the process safely.

**The goal of EMDR is not to erase memories, but to help them lose their emotional charge so they no longer interfere with life in the present.**