

EMDR Client Preparation Guide

Simple illustrated guides for thoughtful preparation



Clients

Understand the process



- Treatment phases and goals
- Shared language and scales
- Questions and informed choices

Prepare together



- History and preparation
- Resources and pause signals
- Individual readiness discussions

Prepare the workspace



- Telehealth planning
- Visual and audio comfort
- Privacy and equipment checks

Close and review



- Unfinished work and closure
- Between-session support
- Reevaluation and next steps



A useful reminder

Educational review draft. Use alongside clinical training and individualized care.

Educational review draft • Awaiting qualified clinical review. Not formal EMDR training, an individualized treatment plan, or emergency care.

Selected framework references

EMDRIA • The Eight Phases of EMDR Therapy

EMDRIA • Experiencing EMDR Therapy

emdrdot.com/resources/preparation

Your preparation conversation roadmap

A simple roadmap for your preparation conversation



Clients

Understand the approach



- Read the EMDR introduction
- Ask how it relates to your concerns
- Discuss other treatment options

Prepare with your therapist



- Explore what helps you feel present
- Discuss support and coping
- Preparation can take time

Keep your choice



- Ask for an explanation
- Agree on a pause signal
- Say what feels manageable

Plan the next step



- What are we working toward?
- How will we choose the pace?
- What support will I have?



A useful reminder

You do not need to figure out the treatment plan by yourself.

Educational review draft • Awaiting qualified clinical review. Not formal EMDR training, an individualized treatment plan, or emergency care.

Selected framework references

EMDRIA • Experiencing EMDR Therapy
VA National Center for PTSD • EMDR for PTSD

emdrdot.com/resources/preparation/client-start

Preparing for your first appointment

You can arrive with questions—not a complete story



Clients

Start with your goals



- What brought you here?
- What feels difficult now?
- What change would help?

Share what is useful



- Relevant history and health needs
- Current pressures and support
- Details at a manageable pace

Ask about the process



- How does preparation work?
- How is privacy protected?
- How can I request a pause?

Make room for preparation



- Build a working relationship
- Discuss options together
- Memory work need not start today



A useful reminder

You do not have to describe every detail at your first appointment.

Educational review draft • Awaiting qualified clinical review. Not formal EMDR training, an individualized treatment plan, or emergency care.

Selected framework references

EMDRIA • Experiencing EMDR Therapy

The eight phases in everyday language

A framework across appointments—not eight tasks today



Clients

1-2: understand and prepare



- 1. History and treatment planning
- 2. Preparation
- Build understanding and supports

3-4: clarify and work



- 3. Assessment
- 4. Desensitization
- Target-focused work when appropriate

5-6: integrate and notice



- 5. Installation
- 6. Body scan
- Review belief and bodily responses

7-8: close and review



- 7. Closure
- 8. Reevaluation
- Check needs and plan what comes next



A useful reminder

Phases can be revisited. Ask your therapist where you are in the plan.

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Selected framework references

EMDRIA • Experiencing EMDR Therapy

Understanding SUD and VOC

Two scales. Two different questions.



Clients + Clinicians • Phase 3

SUD: disturbance



- 0 = no disturbance
- 10 = highest disturbance
- How disturbing does the target feel?

VOC: felt truth



- 1 = completely false
- 7 = completely true
- How true does the positive belief feel?

Use the target context



- Clarify which question is asked
- Relate the answer to the target
- There is no “correct” number

Different purposes



- Higher SUD = more disturbance
- Higher VOC = greater felt truth
- Neither is a diagnosis or readiness score



A useful reminder

A SUD of 6 and a VOC of 2 can describe different parts of the same experience.

Educational review draft • Awaiting qualified clinical review. Not formal EMDR training, an individualized treatment plan, or emergency care.

Selected framework references

EMDRIA • The Eight Phases of EMDR Therapy

Grounding and present-moment orientation

Small ways to reconnect with the present



Clients + Clinicians • Phase 2

Look around



- Notice a neutral object
- Name a color if useful
- Orient to the current room

Notice support



- Feel the chair or floor
- Choose a tolerable contact point
- Respect pain and sensory needs

Keep the choice



- Eyes can stay open
- Breathing is not required
- Skip what feels uncomfortable

Check and adapt



- Does this help connection?
- Slow down if distress grows
- Choose another support together



A useful reminder

Grounding is collaborative. There is no single exercise for everyone.

Educational review draft • Awaiting qualified clinical review. Not formal EMDR training, an individualized treatment plan, or emergency care.

Selected framework references

EMDRIA • Experiencing EMDR Therapy
EMDRIA • The Eight Phases of EMDR Therapy

emdrdot.com/resources/preparation/grounding

Pause signals and client control

Make stopping ordinary and easy to request



Clients + Clinicians • Phase 2

Agree on a signal



- A word such as “pause”
- A clear hand signal
- No reason needs to be given

Practice first



- Rehearse with neutral content
- Check that the signal is visible
- Stop movement promptly

Ask what is needed



- Orient to the room
- Talk, adjust, or stop
- Revisit the plan together

Prepare for disconnection



- Use a backup contact plan
- Know how to reconnect
- Do not rely on the app for crisis care



A useful reminder

Client choice and consent continue throughout the session.

Educational review draft • Awaiting qualified clinical review. Not formal EMDR training, an individualized treatment plan, or emergency care.

Selected framework references

EMDRIA • Experiencing EMDR Therapy
EMDRIA • The Eight Phases of EMDR Therapy

emdrdot.com/resources/preparation/pause-signals

Telehealth preparation

Prepare the plan, the space, and the equipment



Clients + Clinicians • Phase 2

Clinical plan



- Confirm consent and jurisdiction
- Keep emergency details protected
- Agree on a connection-loss plan

Private, comfortable space



- Reduce interruptions
- Position a comfortable display
- Arrange support as needed

Test the equipment



- Charge devices and check internet
- Try visual comfort and stereo audio
- Use neutral demonstration content

Know how to pause



- Rehearse the stop signal
- Know how to reconnect
- Reserve time for closure



A useful reminder

A working screen does not establish clinical suitability for remote treatment.

Educational review draft • Awaiting qualified clinical review. Not formal EMDR training, an individualized treatment plan, or emergency care.

Selected framework references

EMDRIA • Guidelines for Virtual EMDR Therapy
HHS • Telebehavioral health emergency planning

emdrdot.com/resources/preparation/telehealth

When processing is unfinished

A session can end before a target is fully processed



Clients

Name what is unfinished



- Tell your therapist how you feel
- Ask what still needs attention
- Do not judge the session by one number

Return to the present



- Allow time for orientation
- Use supports agreed together
- Discuss immediate needs

Make a support plan



- What feels manageable afterward?
- How do I contact my therapist?
- What if difficulties continue?

Continue thoughtfully



- Agree how the target will be reviewed
- Plan the next appointment
- Do not resume memory work alone



A useful reminder

Unfinished work calls for closure and follow-up—not pressure to finish alone.

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Selected framework references

EMDRIA • Experiencing EMDR Therapy

Between-session support and aftercare

Know what to notice and how to get support



Clients + Clinicians • Phase 7

Expect variability



- Emotions or dreams may change
- Fatigue may occur
- No noticeable change is possible

Use agreed supports



- Tolerable grounding
- Ordinary routines and rest
- Support chosen with the therapist

Know the contact plan



- How to reach the clinician
- Expected response times
- When additional support is needed

Ask for assessment



- Report persistent difficulties
- Report worsening functioning
- Use the crisis plan for immediate danger



A useful reminder

Do not try to finish trauma-memory processing on your own.

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Selected framework references

EMDRIA • Experiencing EMDR Therapy
EMDRIA • The Eight Phases of EMDR Therapy

emdrdot.com/resources/preparation/between-session