

EMDR INFORMED CHOICE

9 Questions to Ask an EMDR Therapist Before Session One

A practical consultation guide with space for notes.

PURPOSE

EMDR is a structured psychotherapy, not simply eye movements or another form of bilateral stimulation. Assessment, case conceptualization, preparation, target selection, pacing, consent, and reevaluation all matter.

HOW TO USE IT

Choose two or three questions that address what you most want to understand. A therapist does not need to recite a perfect answer; listen for thoughtful reasoning, appropriate training, and an approach that can adapt to you.

USE WITHOUT OVER-MONITORING

Do not use this guide as a pass/fail competence test. Different trained clinicians may explain their work differently. The goal is informed choice and a clearer treatment plan, not certainty or a guaranteed outcome.

Before you ask the questions

Bilateral stimulation is one component of EMDR. Competent treatment also involves understanding the presenting problem, deciding whether EMDR fits, identifying relevant targets, preparing for processing, monitoring response, and deciding what comes next.

ASSESS → PREPARE → TARGET → PROCESS → REEVALUATE

THERAPIST OR PRACTICE

DATE

CONTACT OR WEBSITE

A BETTER SIGNAL THAN PERFECT WORDING

A useful answer should make the treatment plan easier to understand: why EMDR is recommended, what is being targeted, how preparation and consent are handled, how response will be monitored, and what happens if the plan needs to change.

INFORMED CHOICE

A therapist should be comfortable explaining when EMDR is not the best next step. Questions are appropriate when the plan is unclear, when treatment seems to move directly into traumatic material without a rationale, or when bilateral stimulation is presented as the entire treatment.

Questions 1-3

1 What EMDR training have you completed?

Listen for a clear explanation of training, consultation or supervised learning components, and how EMDR fits within the clinician's broader practice. No single advanced credential guarantees competence.

NOTES / FIRST IMPRESSION

2 How will you decide whether EMDR is appropriate for what I am experiencing?

Listen for assessment, case conceptualization, treatment goals, relevant risks or complicating factors, and a rationale for why EMDR may or may not fit.

NOTES / FIRST IMPRESSION

3 What happens before we begin memory processing?

Listen for history-taking, treatment planning, preparation, expectations, readiness, and individualized regulation strategies when indicated.

NOTES / FIRST IMPRESSION

Questions 4-6

4 How do you choose what we work on first?

Listen for a rationale connecting targets to current symptoms, triggers, beliefs, behavior patterns, or clinically relevant experiences.

NOTES / FIRST IMPRESSION

5 What will I actually be asked to do during an EMDR session?

Listen for a plain-language explanation of attention to target material, bilateral stimulation options, brief processing sets, check-ins, and communication during the procedure.

NOTES / FIRST IMPRESSION

6 What happens if I become overwhelmed, shut down, dissociate, or want to stop?

Listen for respect for consent, ways to pause or modify processing, attention to engagement, and a plan for significant dysregulation or dissociation when relevant.

NOTES / FIRST IMPRESSION

Questions 7-9

7 How will we know whether EMDR is helping?

Listen for observable, individualized goals and ongoing reevaluation of symptoms, distress, beliefs, triggers, avoidance, functioning, or other agreed outcomes.

NOTES / FIRST IMPRESSION

8 What do you do when processing gets stuck or EMDR is not helping?

Listen for reassessment of the case formulation, preparation, target selection, blocking factors, pacing, comorbid conditions, and whether another approach is appropriate.

NOTES / FIRST IMPRESSION

9 How does EMDR fit with the rest of my treatment?

Listen for a coherent plan linking EMDR to your goals, other interventions, medication management when applicable, and authorized coordination with other providers.

NOTES / FIRST IMPRESSION

After the consultation

You do not need certainty before choosing a therapist. Use these prompts to summarize what became clearer and what still deserves discussion.

WHAT TREATMENT RATIONALE DID I HEAR?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT PREPARATION, PACING, AND CONSENT?

HOW WILL PROGRESS AND FIT BE REEVALUATED?

WHAT FOLLOW-UP QUESTION REMAINS?

EDUCATIONAL USE

This guide supports informed questions; it does not diagnose a condition, evaluate a clinician's competence, guarantee safety or treatment results, or replace individualized clinical judgment.