



## Chapter 6.1 - Client Assessment and Preparation of EMDR Treatment

Client assessment and preparation are foundational steps in the EMDR treatment process. These initial phases serve as the bedrock upon which the therapeutic alliance is built and are critical for ensuring that clients are adequately equipped to tackle the challenging work of processing traumatic memories.

Assessment begins with a comprehensive review of the client's history, including the trauma they have experienced, coping mechanisms they have employed, and their readiness and suitability for EMDR therapy. It is during this phase that the therapist must exercise great sensitivity and discernment. Understanding the full breadth of the client's life experiences allows for a tailored treatment plan that addresses the specific nuances of their trauma. For instance, a therapist might discern the need for additional sessions focused on building coping skills for a client with limited support systems.

Preparation follows assessment and involves educating the client about the principles and procedures of EMDR, setting clear and realistic expectations, and developing a strong therapeutic rapport. Therapists introduce clients to the concept of dual attention and explain how addressing past events can impact their current psychological state. The narrative of one client who feared losing control during therapy illustrates the importance of demystifying EMDR, allowing the client to engage fully in the process, knowing they are in a safe space.

Central to preparation is also the development of stabilization skills. Clients are taught specific techniques, such as the aforementioned diaphragmatic breathing or grounding exercises, to help them regulate their emotional responses both during and outside of

therapy sessions. Consider the story of an anxious client who learned to manage panic symptoms effectively using these techniques, resulting in a newfound sense of personal empowerment.

An important component of EMDR preparation is the resource installation, in which clients build mental 'resources' – images, memories, or constructs that evoke positive emotional responses. These resources serve as anchor points clients can return to for comfort and strength during challenging moments in the treatment. Sharing the case of a survivor of childhood abuse who drew strength from an imagined nurturing caregiver highlights the powerful impact of such resources.

Finally, it is the therapist's role to ensure the client is sufficiently stable to proceed with EMDR processing. This sometimes means dedicating adequate time for the preparation phase, particularly for individuals with complex trauma or dissociative tendencies, who may require additional sessions to build the capacity for emotional regulation before progressing to trauma processing.

**Key Takeaways:**

- Comprehensive client assessment is necessary to understand the history and complexity of trauma.
- Preparation involves educating the client about EMDR and setting realistic expectations.
- Stabilization skills are taught to manage emotional responses throughout the therapy.
- Resource installation is a technique where clients develop positive mental images to use as emotional anchors.
- The therapist must gauge the client's stability, sometimes extending preparation for those with complex trauma or dissociation, before proceeding with EMDR processing.