

Chapter 9

All the Hats You Wear

The clients who most motivated you to start your EMDR journey may be the clients whom you do the least reprocessing with, especially early on. This is an unfortunate but common reality. Your clients with the most extensive trauma are likely to have the most needs of you. You already wear a lot of hats when working with clients with complex trauma, and now add EMDR therapy to the multitude of hats you wear.

Do you know what happens in an average week between sessions with your healthiest clients? Not much. That is part of the fortune of the non-pervasively traumatized. Trauma doesn't endlessly happen to them. What happens in an average week between sessions with your clients with complex trauma? Typically, an enormous amount. They may have housing crises, relational crises, deaths, family or community violence, and physical health issues, some of which may need attending to outside of EMDR therapy. When someone doesn't have anyone in their life to listen to them with compassion, attunement is a trauma-focused intervention in the service of survival. However, our clients also need to heal. We feel the desperate need for the client to heal, sometimes with more urgency than the client is aware of that need in themselves.

Your clients with the highest traumatic load are often those with the least accessible resources and may be the most difficult to resource. Resourcing can take months. It is difficult to prepare a client for the EMDR journey when present life stressors have saturated them. Doing EMDR therapy well requires the capacity for the client to feel worse for a little while. If the client is already at the bottom of the pool, we cannot ask them to dive deeper today. Our interventions in such sessions have to be focused on helping them up and helping to support enough stability so that they can develop a capacity to slow down, be present, and notice. EMDR therapy requires a window of tolerance. We will explore ways to widen the window of tolerance and other ways to help distress ripple inside of it, rather than distress coming like a tsunami and overtopping it.