

EMDR With Complex Trauma

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Cover Artwork by Carol Anna McBride.

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Reviews

“In *EMDR for Complex Trauma*, Tom acts as an encouraging and steady field guide to new (and experienced) EMDR therapists who encounter complicated, but common challenges in therapy. He brings a down-to-earth, approachable tone, generously sharing his accumulated wisdom from years of on-the-ground experience working with complex trauma as both a therapist, a consultant, and a trainer. As I read this I found myself imagining being in conversation with Tom through the mud of the common problems he described with my own clients. I have no doubt that this book will help thousands of newly trained EMDR therapists to find their way through discouragement, frustration, and confoundment to be able to appreciate not only the challenge, but the beauty and nuance of therapeutic work using EMDR with complex trauma.” -April Griffin, MSW RSW RCC

“I wish this book existed when I was first trained as an EMDR therapist. However, I am grateful that it exists now as I embark on my journey as a consultant in training as I will utilize the invaluable information within to help support my consultees through the difficult work of treating C-PTSD using EMDR therapy.” -Amy Larmon, LCSW-R, Certified EMDR Therapist and Consultant-in-Training

“This book puts into clear words the experiences I have seen over the eight years I’ve been doing EMDR. It speaks to trainers, like myself, and to new EMDR clinicians alike. Tom’s writing eloquently speaks to the experience of EMDR and names the why of what happens when ‘EMDR doesn’t work’ or a client ‘isn’t ready for EMDR.’ This book superbly describes how to use all eight phases of standard protocol with fidelity in a way that builds confidence in the therapist and brings ease for the client. This book is the clinical internship of 500 hours we all wish we could have had after basic training. It is a MUST READ for all clinicians who use EMDR in their practice.” -Leslie Pertz, LMSW, PMH-C, NIC

“I really can't begin to tell you how much I love this book. It is like a comforting warm coat on a cold frosty day, wrapped around you to stave off the chill. I just love every part, the exercises, scripts, examples, explanations--it is quite simply going to be my go-to book with EMDR work and, what's more, I know clients will find it a huge help too.”
-Rebekah Jones, Consultant Psychotherapist, Certified EMDR Therapist

“EMDR with Complex Trauma by Thomas Zimmerman is an essential guide for clinicians, especially new EMDR therapists navigating the complexities of trauma work. Zimmerman offers practical strategies to address deep-seated emotional wounds while empowering therapists to trust their own therapeutic instincts. As a new clinician, I found this book invaluable in breaking the stigma around being an 'experiential' therapist—encouraging creative, adaptive approaches grounded in EMDR principles. From somatic interventions to the ethics of trauma treatment, Zimmerman demystifies the process and provides actionable insights, making this book both a manual and a thoughtful meditation on healing. A must-read for any therapist committed to transformative trauma care.” -Naila Brown, MA, LPC-Associate, NCC

“This book is as insightful as it is reassuring and presented in a structure and format that make it easy to digest and refer back to. I particularly appreciated the brief, vulnerable moments of self-disclosure that welcomed me into your journey of self-discovery and professional learning and made me feel like it's okay to feel unsure from time to time. I'm sure this book will be a welcome addition to many EMDR therapists' libraries.”
-Lionel Walters, Trauma Counsellor and Trainer

“I recently audited Part II of a foundational training where, in real-time, therapists were sharing their experience of hitting roadblocks while starting reprocessing, and all of the cases seemed to be complex trauma. All I can think is that, after the foundational manual, this book should be the next required reading. It breaks down treating our most complex clients in a manageable and understandable way. It is a perfect balance of understanding the "why" behind modifications made and practical applications and scripts to use with clients. In contrast to other books about complex trauma, this book is easy to read and digest. It is a "must have" on the shelf of every EMDR clinician.” -Lisa Johanns, LPC

“An essential companion for the EMDR therapist. This book provides insights on needed considerations and adjustments in working with complex trauma. It serves as a guide map of sorts, offering direction when feeling stuck or questioning which direction to take with a client. It validates adaptations to the basic protocol, offers scripts for resourcing, and important cautious approaches for compassionate successful work in this area.” -Rebecca Carr, NCC, LPC, PMH-C

“*EMDR with Complex Trauma* fills an important gap in the literature available to newer EMDR-trained therapists like me. No matter how well we’re taught the standard protocol, even including some time devoted to adaptations for complex trauma and dissociation if we’re lucky, basic training just doesn’t give us enough preparation for treating most of the clients we’re likely to meet. Other texts addressing treatment of complex trauma with EMDR exist, and some are excellent (if dense), but Zimmerman’s book accomplishes what these others don’t: it is clear, brief, easy to read, and gives a set of practical tools to break down the process in ways that both therapists and clients can understand. Zimmerman draws on years of experience as an EMDR clinician and personal experiences related to his own healing process, both of which make him uniquely qualified to write this book. I found the entire reading experience profoundly relatable and enlightening as someone who uses EMDR with neurodivergent clients with complex trauma histories. The ‘dip your toe in’ resources have been especially helpful, and I also appreciate having new language to simply and concretely describe the process of EMDR to clients who ask me questions like “what does ‘go with that’ even mean?” I have highlighting and underlining on almost every page, and I know this will be a book I refer to again and again. If you’re an EMDR therapist, especially a newly trained one confused and overwhelmed by all the literature available to you, please do yourself and your clients a favor and add this book to your library!” -Maija Salins, LMSW, LMT, CST-D, SEP

“This manual is a true work of personal art. It is filled with lived experience and story, allowing readers to relate and understand the ‘why and how’ to approach complex trauma from an EMDR perspective. The metaphors and resources take complex clinical knowledge and translate it into simple and practical ways which promotes clinicians’ confidence and creativity. I would recommend this skillfully crafted "manual" to any therapist.” -Rhea Eady, RSW & MSW

Review credits: Helpful feedback on drafts of this book was received by April Griffin, MSW RSW RCC; Celine Polilli, MA, LPC; and Meg Kapil, PhD, CCS, RCC-ACS, in addition to the above reviewers.

Preface

I have written the book that I needed to write. It is the book that I would have needed to read when I was starting my EMDR journey with severely complex clients. I have looked closely at every word to help make sure that none are more complicated than I need them to be. I view this book as one part guide and one part meditation. My hope is that this perspective is helpful. It comes from a deep interest and passion in doing this work. There is beauty in the work we do. I hope that some of this beauty is communicated in these words. But more than anything, I hope that this book finds its way to you on a random Thursday and reminds you that the work you do is essential, that this work is almost always hard, that you already embody a lot of what your clients most need of you, and that difficulties in this work often contain the important gift of information about your client's unique and complex nervous system.

This is a different kind of book. It captures how one person does and understands EMDR therapy. It is not meant to be dogma but offered to expand possibility and flexibility when working with clients with severe trauma.

While I encourage you to purchase print copies of this book and share them with new trainees, much of its content is available at the website below. Because parts of this book may be shared separately, you will see that some of the guidance, examples, or metaphors repeat across multiple chapters.

<https://EMDRwithComplexTrauma.com>

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