

# EMDR and ACT - Similarities and distinctions

While eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) are both forms of psychotherapy and share similarities, they have distinct theoretical frameworks and treatment approaches.

	EMDR	ACT
<b>Focus</b>	Processing maladaptively stored memory networks that underpin current symptoms.	Increasing psychological flexibility, the capacity to contact the present moment fully and act effectively in service of chosen values.
<b>Key concepts</b>	Activation of memory networks within dual attention awareness facilitates adaptive integration and reconsolidation.	Acceptance of difficult thoughts/feelings and commitment to values-based action.
<b>Role of mindfulness</b>	Dual attention awareness requires present-moment observation of internal experience without active avoidance or cognitive control.	Central to observing thoughts/feelings without judgment or attachment.
<b>Techniques</b>	Bilateral stimulation, identifying target memories, and desensitisation through structured protocols.	Defusion strategies, acceptance skills, values clarification, and committed action.
<b>View of thoughts</b>	Cognitions reflect maladaptively stored experiences and may shift as memory networks integrate.	Thoughts are normal relational responses; therapy targets their behavioural function rather than their literal content
<b>Mechanism of change</b>	Memory reconsolidation and adaptive integration.	Functional contextual shift in relational responding.
<b>Therapeutic goal</b>	Facilitating adaptive resolution of memory networks so they are integrated into broader autobiographical memory without dysfunction	Helping people take meaningful action guided by values, even during difficult moments
<b>Conceptualisation of psychopathology</b>	Symptoms arise from unprocessed memory networks.	Suffering arises from psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance.
<b>Temporal orientation</b>	Past → Present → Future template.	Present-moment process with values-guided future orientation.
<b>Origins</b>	Developed by Francine Shapiro, based on the Adaptive Information Processing model.	Developed by Steven Hayes and colleagues, grounded in behavioural science.

EMDR may alter the intensity and rigidity of trauma-linked memory networks, while ACT enhances the individual's capacity to relate flexibly to internal experiences and pursue valued action. Integration can therefore address both the content of distressing memories and the contextual function of ongoing experience.