

## 7. Containing Memories

Skills in containing traumatic memories are intended to reduce the intrusion of distressing and traumatic memories. The skills will help you to distance yourself from the memories at the same time as the memories are recognized and acknowledged. These skills can be used when you are too overwhelmed to relate to the feelings and images related to the trauma, or when you are involved in an important, meaningful and good activity in the present moment that it is important to complete, or - when it is time to rest after a well-executed piece of trauma work.

You can use concrete rooms and boxes in the physical reality for this strategy, and you can use visual spaces in your imagination for containing the trauma-memories. I should also remind here that such containment techniques are chosen by yourself and used temporarily, until you have acquired sufficient mental capacity to stay within the window of tolerance when the memories are activated. The building of these skills precede the processing of trauma-memories in a second trauma treatment phase. You contain your memories until you are ready to process them in your therapy.

With the use of visualization, you can develop inner containers and spaces for the trauma memories:

Imagine:

- A bank vault, a fire and theft-proof room in the bank, a safe, computer file stored in the cloud, locked room, a jam glass, etc.
- A container or vessel, a gas balloon high up in the air, a submarine, an airplane that flies to distant continents with a box containing the trauma-memories.
- Or any image that's right for you. Use one that is right for you.

Exercise: Imagine the container of your choice. It can be anything. Imagine that it has exactly the size and design it needs to contain what's bothering you. What color does it have? What shape? What is the temperature? How thick are the walls? Now imagine that whatever is bothering you enters into the container.

Do not try to push the troublesome things into the container, but notice that they are moving and entering the container. When everything is inside the container, you can close and lock the container.

You are the one in control of these memories, feelings and thoughts, and you choose when you want to take them out of the container again. No one else has access.

You can do this exercise anytime you need it.

If you find it difficult to imagine this in your fantasy, you can use a container from the physical reality. You can write down disturbing memories, body sensations, feelings and thoughts on pieces of paper.

You may put them in a drawer, box or in a room – maybe with extra locks - or leave them with the therapist - to bring it up at a later date, when you have the capacity to do so.

You can even use stones to symbolize your distressing and burdensome memories, you can set the stones down and leave them at a selected place, or you may throw the stones over your shoulder and leave them behind you.

Some people find it helpful to write a letter to a supportive person, a higher power, spiritual figure. Leave it at a place that is appropriate for that use.

Writing diary may be a help to make the reactions clearer to yourself, and you can express the thoughts and feelings in a safe and confidential way. Create a good setting for writing. Find a quiet place where the diary can be written. When activated, you can write about it in your journal. Write as much as your tolerance window allows: be it headlines? or with more details? – feelings? body sensations - where do you sense it in your body? - *if* your window of tolerance allows you. Set a time-frame for the writing, such as 5, 10, or 15 minutes. Then close the journal - as a symbol of closing the room to the memories. When the book is closed - you have enclosed the intrusive and troublesome feelings, thoughts, and body sensations of the memories. Put the diary back in a drawer or closet, leave it. Subsequently, you can do something that is soothing and positive, and that connects you to the present moment - apply a skill you have acquired with these qualities.

You may use art to express what you feel. You may express yourself through music and using your voice. You may draw or paint pictures, give visual expression to the memories and feelings. Write poems. You may put these pictures or written work away for later - or you can bring it to the therapist.

If it activates you too much, you can experiment to find other ways to contain the memories.

Just as containers can leak, these techniques are not perfect and do not work at all times. In the beginning, a suggestion is to practice with memories and reactions that distresses you to only a mild degree. Then it becomes easier to use the skills when you are triggered to a greater degree. If it doesn't work right away, try the technique again. Practice is the key to mastering.

You may use a scale from 1-10 to measure a movement in the right direction.

Don't forget to pause after every step in the right direction and give yourself recognition.

Good luck! Thanks for now!

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