

Containment

Containment is about control. The word container suggests limits, edges that hold something. A non-permeable container does not leak. It is about creating some boundaries around the healing work that allows you some control over the process. It helps you feel that you are in charge of your healing work and of your intrusive symptoms (rather than them being in control of you).

Containment is a self-management tool that allows you to store overwhelming information, images, or feelings for exploration at a later time, without causing distress to you in the present. *Containing is about choosing* when you will engage in healing work or drop into emotions. If you decide the time is not right, then you contain can your experience until you are ready to deal with it.

Containment is different from suppressing feelings. When we suppress our feelings we don't acknowledge them, we just want them to go away. Containment acknowledges the feelings and says, "I know you're there and I will deal with you when I'm ready" (and you make a plan to go back to them). It affirms that you are in charge of the process and will decide when and how you will connect with these feelings (or intrusive thoughts, images or impulses).

Containers can be concrete like a shoebox, purchased box or a basket. This makes real (concrete) the idea of containing.

Containers can be imaginary. Creating an image of (or describing in writing) a container to hold intrusive material provides you with a method of self- control that can protect you from re-traumatization.

Time can act as a container. You may choose to work on something for a short period of time. The time limits on counseling or group sessions act to contain the work.

When you gain more control and become more emotionally stable, you can decide to examine some of these overwhelming thoughts, memories, feelings or impulses. Then you can remove them, one at a time, just a bit at a time, from the container or containers you have created for their safe protection.

Application

- When you start to feel unsafe, overwhelmed or out of control, your container can be a safe place that you imagine yourself to be in, or it can be something you imagine putting your troubles into.
- You may create one or several imaginary containers. An imaginary container has the advantage of always being available. You can visualize your container when you are alone or in public to temporarily contain overwhelming feelings and thoughts. Creating an image of your container or describing it in writing will make it more real and available to you. Practice is also helpful to build your confidence in using this technique.
- You can have a real container (like a decorated box or tin) for when you journal or do other process work, which you can open at the beginning and close at the end to remind you to put the work aside until next time. You can actually put things in the box to hold them for you.
- Setting time limits can assist containment. You can choose where and when you work on your issues, e.g. if journaling you can set a timer for 5-20 minutes.
- If you use a journal with a hard cover, snapping the cover shut with a ‘thwack!’ can convey the idea that “I am done now. I am putting this aside until next time.”
- If drawing or writing to express yourself the sheet of paper can act as a container. Border the paper if you need to strengthen the container. You may further contain by folding and re-folding the paper and/or by putting it in a box.
- Use the image/idea of a volume control and turning down the volume on your thoughts or feelings.