

The Container

This technique is useful for people who have difficulty handling distress between sessions. If you are undergoing specific trauma therapy involving memory processing for example TFCBT or EMDR, this technique could slow down the processing element, but offers safety between sessions. It may be helpful for people who are not feeling stable or become easily flooded with distress.



You can ask someone to help you by reading this out or read it yourself and record your voice so that you can play it back to do the exercise. If you are assisting someone else with this visualisation, acknowledge any feedback that they give you about what they are imagining but avoid 'helping' as it is important that it is their visualisation.

Do the exercise slowly and as calmly as you can, allowing enough time for you to focus on visualising the individual steps and adding as much detail as you can. It may help if you close your eyes, but you can just look down and try not to focus your gaze.

Firstly, ensure you are settled and sitting in a relaxed position somewhere private. Notice your breathing and allow yourself to breathe more deeply for a couple of minutes.

"I want you to bring some sort of very secure container to your mind's eye, perhaps in this room, or in another secure safe place. This container will be strong enough to hold all this disturbing stuff – the memories, images, thoughts, physical sensations, sounds, smells, emotions.

What would this container have to be like in order to securely hold your distress? (e.g. a metal safe, a locked drawer, a shipping container, a crate)

Can you describe it to me? What is it? What colour is it? How big is it? How heavy is it? What does it look like? What is it made of? What makes it safe and secure?



Now imagine taking the distressing images and put them inside or send them to the container.

Now take the distressing thoughts..... ... and put them inside. You do not have to name them as you do this, just put them away.

Then repeat this step for the sounds, physical sensations, smells and difficult emotions.

Is there anything else that needs to go in there?



Now shut the door securely. How do we make the door more secure?

OK, can you do that now? Is it secure now? Is there anything else you need to do to make it more secure? (E.g. add weights, place it inside a strong room)

How does this feel now?

Shall we leave this container in the room here, or is there a different secure place where we can leave this container? (E.g. bury it in a hole, drop it off a pier into the ocean)

You can imagine yourself turning away from it now and leaving it behind. Spend a few minutes reflecting that you have put the distressing material away. Notice your breathing again and when you are ready open your eyes or look up and 'come back' into the room."

After the exercise try to find something to do as a distraction so you do not return to the distressing thoughts.

During the week, (or until next time), if anything disturbing comes up, just imagine the process of sending the distressing thoughts or memories away again and leaving them in your container.