

Container

Adapted from the work of Katie O'Shea,
co-creator of the EMDR Early Trauma Protocol "When There Are No Words"

Sample script:

"We all have things that have happened to us and stuff that may come up from time to time, so we need to have a way to set that stuff aside until we can give it our full attention. Our systems are made to be able to do this, with our right hemispheres storing experiences until we can give them our full attention and learn (or unlearn) all that we need to. This will be what happens during our time together...we'll take stuff out bit by bit so you can learn (or unlearn) from it, *and we'll do it together*. Until then, you need a place where you can store this stuff, and you can help your right hemisphere by picturing a place or container to set that stuff aside for now. What comes to mind as a place where anything that needs to be reviewed can be stored until you can give it your full attention? It can be a picture in your mind or you can leave it here with me in my box."

If client pictures something, ask what to call it...this is their cue word. Or, they may select your container.

"Now, just focus on your *cue word/my container* and let everything that needs to be reviewed from the past, the present, and the future be set aside for now. Let me know when it's all in, or if you're having any trouble."

Ask client to practice containing until your next appointment, perhaps at times of transition such as waking up in the morning or going from work to home. Let them know that their brain is made to do this and the more they practice the easier it will get to do this, even with very distressing content. Acknowledge that their container may change or develop over time and that this is totally fine.

Moving forward, you can cue the client to contain in session, or the client can cue themselves outside of session by saying the bolded phrase above.

Tips:

- Should NOT be something that you see in day to day life...as this may be activating.
- Should have a way to keep material inside (i.e., a lock or a "time stamp" until next session).
- Container can develop or change...as you practice you may realize that you need something different, bigger, or stronger.
- Feelings do NOT go in the container, but "whatever the feelings are about" can.
- Parts of self do NOT go in the container...this requires a Safe Place.
- Should feel like looking at the material easily and effortlessly and/or a felt-sense vs. itemizing.
- If it's difficult to set something aside, it might just mean it's ready to be cleared and that you need support and connection.