

## 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.** It 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 can contain your experience until you are ready to deal with it.

**Containment is different from repression or suppression.** When we suppress our memories, thoughts, feelings, and emotions, we don’t acknowledge that they exist: 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.* This part is critical. It affirms that you are in charge of the process and will decide when and how you will connect with these feelings, intrusive thoughts, images, or impulses.

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

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

**Places can act as a container.** You can choose to leave your heavy emotions, scary images, or impulses in your counsellor’s office, or in a safe room in your home, or even somewhere in nature.

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

**When you gain more control, become more emotionally stable, or simply have the time,** you can decide to examine some of these overwhelming thoughts, memories, feelings, or impulses. You can remove them, one at a time in manageable amounts, from the container(s) 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 in to.
- 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 a journal) for when you do begin to process the things you've contained, either through writing, drawing, etc. You can open this physical container at the beginning and close it at the end to remind you to put the work aside until next time. You can physically put things in this container to hold them for you.
- Setting time limits can assist containment. You can choose where and when you work on your issues (for example, when journaling, set a timer for 5-20 minutes).
- If you use a journal with a hard cover, snapping the cover shut 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 the paper, or putting it in your physical container.