

Therapist Info Sheet

Container resources are useful when working with patients who have trauma. They allow patients to compartmentalize traumatic experiences that overwhelm their somatic senses and their thoughts without warning. Container resources allow clients to get some distance from the experience as they are learning about treatment and planning it with their therapists. Container resources are only effective if they let the client feel like they have agency and a sense of self and control.

Effective containers are personalized to the things that make the client feel powerful and are closely identified with their sense of self. Our cars are machines that we spend a lot of time, money, and often emotion on. This relationship makes them ideal for escape vehicles for the things we need a break from. Occasionally you will have a client that may not be a car person or that this container is not personal too. In this situation I have adapted a "dream house" or "favorite scene from fiction" in place of the car to help these patients.

It is important that container resources do not try to obliterate or permanently remove the traumatic experience from the mind of the patient. Patients know instinctively that the trauma is part of them and part of their story even though this knowledge can be extremely distressing. Patients also know instinctively that they must process the trauma that they have experienced, and resist suggestion that the trauma does not exist or can disappear. Even if we do not know how we can possibly survive integrating a particular experience into the conscious story of our lives, we will still know that we must and resist denying a lived experience when it is indirectly suggested in therapy or elsewhere.

I use container resources to help patients have some take home tools before we begin treatment for trauma. Treating repressed trauma will often mean that patients will begin to experience distress at an increased frequency in their own lives. We must be careful as therapists to make sure that we encourage patients to heal, while at the same time allowing patients to set the pace of their own healing.

When we bring into the awareness an experience that a patient has been resisting conscious awareness of, we are putting the patient into closer proximity to something that has damaged them. While this allows us to work with the trauma as therapists, we should be aware of the toll that we take on the rest of a patient's life when we force patients to revisit painful moments in their lives. Container resources can be important tools for patients to have in between sessions when trauma work is being done.

Trauma Container Worksheet - Design a Car

Imagine

1. Imagine your dream car, factory or custom, imaginary or real.
2. What does it look like and how does it drive?
3. What does your ideal interior of this car look like? How does it sound and how does it feel.
4. Sit down in the driver's seat. Turn on the car and dial the radio. What are you feeling?
5. Start to drive and experience the handling, acceleration, and feel of the car. What do you notice?

Understand the Trauma

1. Notice the parts of the incident that you experience involuntarily. Write them down.
2. Notice the things that you see, smell and hear. Write them down.

Leave the Situation

1. Notice the image of the trauma, and slowly visualize yourself watching it from the rearview mirror of your car while you are sitting in the driver's seat.
2. Notice the inside of the car. Touch the material that lines it. Feel yourself start the car and move the gear shift into drive. Put your foot on the gas pedal.
3. Notice the scenery outside of the car and the feel of the road. Feel the wind outside of the window and notice the weather. Feel the momentum of the car moving forward on the road.
4. Watch the traumatic experience in the rearview mirror of the car shrinking behind you on the road. Watch as the experience stays still on the road behind you, but do not try to force it out of your mind



5. Realize you can come back to this spot if you ever need to. You are not getting rid of the image in the mirror. You are just leaving it for a while.