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Container and Calm Place Exercises
Instructions for Outside of Therapy

***Note: this resource is for current therapy clients of Dr. Wright. For safety purposes, please do not practice Container or Calm Place exercises while driving or performing any other activity in which you need to be fully alert**

Once we have successfully installed your Container and Calm Place in therapy, you may practice them outside of sessions to strengthen their effectiveness.

The more you practice, the more quickly and easily they may function as tools to help you **reduce distress in the moment**. The tools can be helpful in **managing intrusive memories from the past**, or distress about more mundane **situations occurring in the present**.

Instructions for practicing outside of therapy:

- Practice **at least once a day**, at a time when it is **easy** (i.e. a time/place when you are reasonably sure you'll be able to relax and feel relatively calm).
- **If you practice in bed** when you first wake up or before going to sleep, **practice outside of bed at least once a day**. You don't want to associate the exercises solely with going to sleep.
- **Do not practice while driving**, or in any situation in which your safety requires you to be fully alert to your surroundings.
- "Clear the decks" with the **Container first, then practice Calm Place**.
- Remember Calm Place is **not a meditation; it's not necessary to stay for a long time**. You are looking to create a **shift in the moment** into a place of more calm or relaxation--once you feel the shift, you can stay awhile or stop, it's up to you.
- Once you feel a shift into a more calm and relaxed state, remember to say your **Cue Word** silently to yourself a few times as you imagine yourself in your Calm Place.
- **If you get stuck or frustrated, stop**. Make a note of what wasn't working and we'll talk about it during our next session.
- **Once practicing the exercises when it's easy is working well, start practicing in ordinary situations:** in parking lots, at work, in the grocery store, in meetings, etc. Your level of distress should be no higher than a 3 out of 10 in these ordinary situations (where 0 is no distress/neutral and 10 is an intolerable level of distress).
- Once practicing in ordinary situations is relatively easy and working well, you may start to practice **in response to more distressing situations**. Make note of how it went and we can discuss it in therapy.
- It is best not to attempt to use Calm Place in response to highly distressing situations, or situations you know are triggers for you, until you've practiced it enough in easy and ordinary situations that it comes naturally.

When to use the Container and Calm Place (once you have practiced as outlined above, for as long as it takes to get comfortable using them):

- Are you feeling **more distressed in the moment** than you would like to be? Do you **wish to reduce your level of distress** right now?
- Have you determined that how you are feeling is **not serving any reasonable purpose** at this time? Even if it is, is this simply **the wrong time** to be distressed?
- If yes, begin by putting **all sources of distress from the past, present and future into your Container, seal the Container shut, and remind yourself that nothing can exit the Container**

- by itself--** it is your choice when to take things out of the Container, and then only one issue at a time.
- Once you have "cleared the decks" by putting all sources of distress away in your Container, **if you are feeling any residual distress use the Calm Place exercise to relax further.** Often, use of the Container will significantly reduce distress, but it's also not unusual to be left with some residual emotion and/or body sensation (tension, tightness, pain, etc.). Use of the Calm Place can help you to release those last sources of tension and distress.
 - **Reducing distress in the moment doesn't mean putting distress away forever:** you can always revisit an issue at a later time to process it, communicate, make plans, etc.
 - Remember that **any reduction in distress levels is a win**, even if you aren't able to come to a neutral/completely calm state. Similarly, **it is not a failure if you find you need to use the tools repeatedly throughout the day.**