



## Container Exercise

By Hud McWilliams

There is no 'magic'! By which I mean good relationships are a product of skill and practice. Not some esoteric 'click' or chemistry.

The purpose of the container exercise is to create a safe space for wrestling with whatever issues a couple has. Wrestling is qualitatively different from fighting; which is never productive.

### The container is:

- to be done weekly. The ritual and rhythm are necessary, similar to muscle memory in sports or playing the guitar. If it's not done regularly it works poorly.
- to be done in a public space (i.e. not at home)
- to be timed and adhered to. Only one hour. Some couples set a timer!
- to be agreed to before you do one so that there is a pre-decision to do this, yield to it
- to be scheduled at a time when both parties are and have available energy to perform well. (middle of the day often works best)
- to be scheduled intentionally in your calendars. You set the time and make it happen.

We value something we make the space, time, and money available for it if it is truly important to us. This merits a further comment: most people at the end of their lives value relationships. Yet, this is seldom developed in a truly meaningful manner. So do not be surprised when almost anything detracts you from doing this regularly. It is because it is so close to the center of us, that we do not find it "comfortable or easy" to be exposed and face in the light. Although almost all claim to value this, the reality is that we seldom practice it.

- to be started the first time by a coin toss, who ever wins determines who will take the first exercise and then it rotates back and forth

### The responsibility is simple for the person in charge of that week's container:

1. To set the agenda. i.e. what is to be talked about. The subject does not matter nearly as much as the process, so most any topic will do, just choose and be clear.
2. To set the parameters for how you talk/discuss.

For example: Nancy and I would often say that the other could not interrupt until we were through with our musings. Then the listening partner had to say 'what their

understanding was of what they had listened to' so there could be a measure.

Container exercise: seek clarity before feedback. In other words the partner in charge of the container sets the limits of the conversation both in subject and method

- It is a good practice to break from this and do something fun, like have a small yogurt, just to re-ground yourselves after it is over. I would not recommend bowling...