

Sensory joy to the rescue: emotional containers and portable safe spaces

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What we will cover today

1. Explain where the idea for this topic came from

2. Define emotional containers and portable safe spaces and give some examples

3. Explore ideas on how to use our time at Autscap to create a portable safe space

The idea...



- It's well-known that having a more sensitive nervous system means that autistic people experience more sensory triggers and are more easily dysregulated.
- But what if we could use our sensory sensitivity to our advantage to bring a sense of peace and joy to helps us get through difficult experiences?

The lived experience evidence #1

Clothing and companions can create a strong positive emotional response:



The lived experience evidence #2



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I like to return there in my mind, to imagine that I am back again in that room. Sometimes I push my thumb into an orange just for the scent of it, and it takes me there: the peace, the spaciousness of an unhurried afternoon, the quality of attention to small things.

– Enchantment: Awakening Wonder in an Anxious Age by Katherine May (late-diagnosed autistic)



The scientific evidence



“Smell [and taste are] directly connected to the emotional processing areas of the brain,” says Charles Spence, a professor of experimental psychology at Oxford University, “whereas the rational senses like hearing and vision get processed in the cortex.” In fact, Spence says, more than half of the neocortex – itself more than half the volume of the brain – is given over to processing what we see.

[‘Smell is really important for social communication’: how technology is ruining our senses | Technology | The Guardian](#)



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Emotional containers & portable safe spaces

Emotional containers

When to use

- When dealing with confusing or overwhelming emotions.

How it works

- Helps create more distance between you and your internal experience (thoughts, feelings, sensations), effectively reducing (or diffusing – Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) the difficult experience.
- Helps recognise that these internal experiences are a normal part of being human, promoting Self-Compassion (Kristin Neff).

Examples of emotional containers

Expressive writing

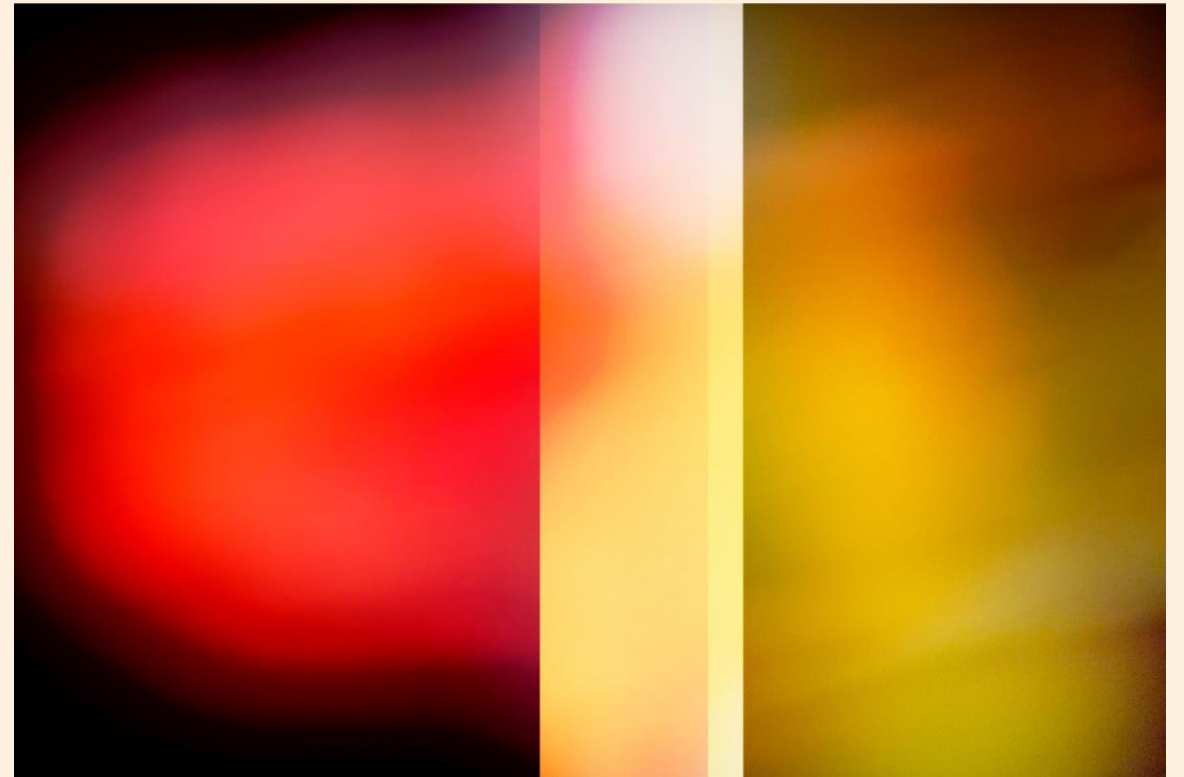
●	My brain took me for a ride
	I'm a carousel in an amusement park
	Going round and round
	In circles
	A washing machine stuck on a spin cycle
	My throat is bone-dry
	I'm a dog chasing its tail
●	

Examples of emotional containers

Visual art

Abstract creation seems to create a channel in me by which the intensity of experience is allowed to flow through and dissipate. As a result, I can speak about issues that I don't necessarily feel safe or capable articulating.

– [Glenn_m_w](#), Contemporary Abstract & Landscape Photography.



Examples of emotional containers

Quotes

Frodo: What are we holding onto, Sam?

Sam: That there's some good in this world,
Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for.

Frodo and Sam

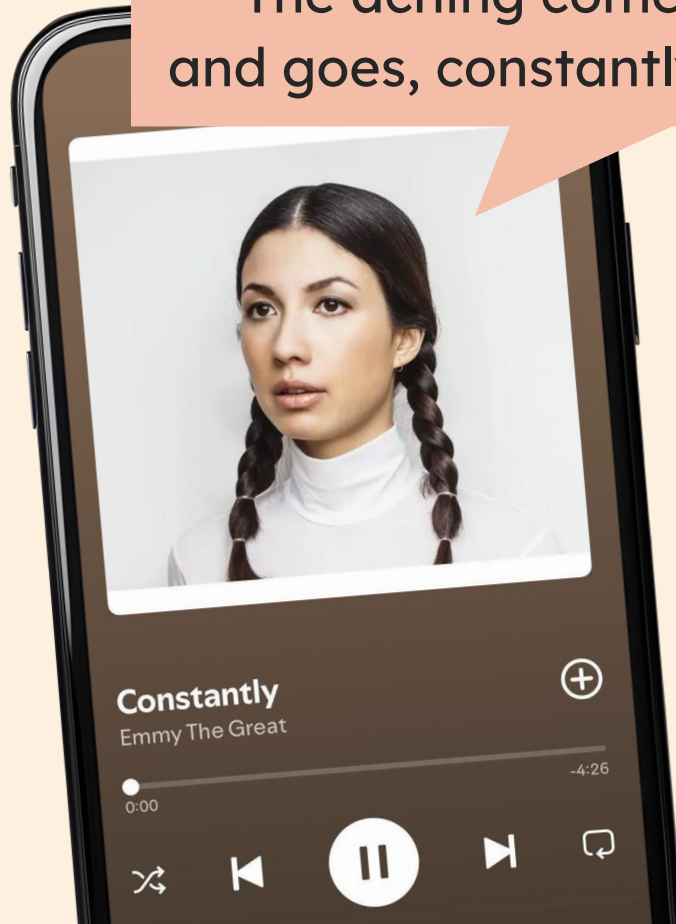
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers



Examples of emotional containers

Music

“ The aching comes
and goes, constantly ”



Looking for inspiration?



BBC Radio 4 Soul Music
Series about pieces of
music with a powerful
emotional impact

Episodes (196 Available)
[BBC Sounds - Soul Music](#)
[- Available Episodes](#)

Emotional containers

Some of us probably create emotional containers often – and maybe even have a career out of it?

- Visual artists
- Song writers and poets
- Counsellors, therapists, coaches and mentors

Portable safe spaces

When to use

- When preparing for an unfamiliar or predictably stressful situation.

How it works

- Helps create additional cues of safety in an environment that you expect to contain many cues of danger (based on Deb Dana's work on Polyvagal Theory).
- Can act as a distraction from an emotionally difficult experience (Dialectical Behaviour Therapy).

Examples of portable safe spaces

Bringing along humans that make you feel safe



Examples of portable safe spaces

Portable mementos from safe spaces



Examples of portable safe spaces



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Portable mementos from safe spaces

Public Playlist

Sensory reset

Alicja Noc • 40 songs, 2 hr 42 min

⏸️ 🔀 ⬇️ 👤 ... 🔍 Custom order ☰

#	Title	Album	⌚
1	 Eastern Sun Ayla Nereo	Hollow Bone	2:30
2	 Another Earth Gone Gone Beyond	2030	3:34



Examples of portable safe spaces

Portable mementos from safe spaces



Creating portable safe spaces at Autscap



Some ideas:

- Favourite Autscap **meal** – make into your comfort food
- Find a **song** that “fits” into Autscap and listen to it a lot while you’re here
- Write a **poem** about how Autscap makes you feel – could maybe make it into a paired or group activity?
- Autscap name / interaction system **badge** (with permission)
- Nurture connections with **people** met at Autscap

Summary of key points

We can use our sensory sensitivity to our advantage by understanding what brings us **sensory calm and joy**.

Emotional containers can help process overwhelm.
Find your “thing”: create or connect with other people’s creations.

Portable safe spaces can help prepare for difficult situations.
Choose your “thing” and nurture it by reconnecting with it often.