

# Group Container EMDR Protocol

(Formerly called The IMMA EMDR Group Protocol)

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The Group Space EMDR Protocol is based on the Integrative Group Treatment Protocol (IGTP) by Jarero, Artigas, Alcalá, & Lopez (2008), the 4 Elements Exercise by Elan Shapiro (2007), principles of group therapy (Klein & Shermer (2000) and dialectical principles (Laub, 2001, (Laub & Weiner 2007, 2013, Laub, Weiner & Bender, 2017)

This protocol was designed for small groups of children from the age of 5. The language should, of course, be adjusted to suit the developmental level of the group. The protocol should be used only by EMDR-trained therapists. The therapist must have the ability to react on the spot, evaluate and provide further treatment for clients who are overwhelmed by the traumatic material. We recommend that work with this protocol should include at least two group facilitators in addition to the leader in order to monitor the group and help the children carry out the instructions. The younger the children, the more facilitators are needed to ensure that each child feels safe and emotionally supported. The protocol has been used effectively for adult clients as well.

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## **PHASE 1- HISTORY TAKING**

As far as is reasonable, relevant information about the participants is obtained, including from parents and teachers. The CROPS (Child Report of Post –Traumatic Symptoms) and PROPS (Parent Report of Post –Traumatic Symptoms) can be used. (Greenwald & Rubin 1999).

## **PHASE 2 - PREPARATION**

### **SETTING**

(The masculine, "he" is used to avoid awkwardness, but we are obviously referring to both boys and girls)

There are two circles in the room:

In the inner circle, the group processing and group sharing are done. In the outer circle the individual processing occurs via the art work. The inner circle can be set up with chairs, or, alternatively, children can be seated on the floor. The children sit facing the center of the circle with their drawings on the floor in front of them. They tap all together. The outer circle is set up with tables for the individual art work (If the tables are high the children can work while standing). On the tables there are soft crayons, 4 sheets of paper stapled together (A4), and 2 separate pages, the first for drawing the safe/calm place at the beginning of the process and the second is for drawing the future picture at the end of the process (Using a whole page for each drawing is important to enable an emotional and creative expression). In the outer circle the therapists and facilitators are able to observe and relate to the needs of each child.

The movement from the inner circle to the outer circle is a reflection of the simultaneous group and individual process. The group serves three functions: containing fear and anxiety, boosting resources and hope and creating connectedness among the children. The individual process

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enables each child to bring up the traumatic material in his own unique way as he draws in his own space and at his own pace.

## **JOINING AND INTRODUCTION**

The children sit in the inner circle. The leader and the facilitators introduce themselves and ask each child to say his name and age.

Say: "*We all have gone through some difficult events lately and this is why we are here together to share and learn how to make the difficult experience less disturbing and to strengthen each other. We will start with an exercise that will help you reduce your fear and tension*".

From the beginning of the session there is an emphasis on the group setting as a resource.

Therefore, it is important to provide time for the children to share their own experiences in the group. (*This may cause some activation which will be followed by the invitation to regulate through the 4 elements which follows*).

## **THE 4 ELEMENTS EXERCISE**

Each child receives an "Imma bracelet"<sup>1</sup>.

Say: "*All that we shared now may bring up unpleasant memories, feelings, tension in your body, so we will learn a special activity to help you relax. We call it the 4 Elements: Earth, Air, Water, and Fire*"<sup>2</sup> (The leader may write this on the blackboard as s/he explains). *You can put it*

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<sup>1</sup> The bracelet can be a colored elastic band or length of yarn. Instead of a bracelet one might use a sticker on a watch or a cell phone.

<sup>2</sup> It is a good fire which lights our imagination into a good place.

*on your wrist now and stretch it like this... (demonstrate). Every time you stretch the bracelet it will remind you that you know how to relax yourself with the 4 Element exercise. Notice how tense you feel now using the numbers from 0-10. 10 means very, very tense and 0 is not tense at all.*

If the children are too young to follow these instructions, we ask them to note if they are very, very tense, a little bit tense, and not at all tense.

#### **THE 4 ELEMENTS EXERCISE:**

##### **EARTH (Grounding = safety in the present / reality)**

Say: *“Now let's start with EARTH. Let's stand and shake our hands and bodies a little to let go of the tension in our muscles. (Shaking hands together). You may sit down and notice how your body feels, notice your feet on the ground. Stamp hard and feel how good it feels in the soles of your feet, how the ground holds and supports you. You can also feel how the chair supports you as you lean back. Let yourself enjoy that good feeling of steadiness and support that means you're here right now.....with all of your body.....connected to the ground”.*

##### **AIR (Breath = strength and centering)**

Say: *“Next is AIR and this has to do with learning to breathe deeply. Put one hand on your tummy and one hand on your chest. Now breathe deeply and notice how the hand on your tummy moves with the air that comes in. Try to bring the air higher into your chest until you can't hold the air any longer than breathe out slowly ...slowly... until all the air comes out. Now we'll do that together two more times. Ready? Let's do it again. Breathe deeply again and notice how the hand on your tummy moves with the air that comes in. Bring the air higher into your chest until you can't hold the air any longer than breathe out slowly...slowly until all*

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*the air comes out. Great. Now one more time: Breathe deeply again and notice how the hand on your tummy moves with the air that comes in. Bring the air higher into your chest until you can't hold the air any longer than breathe out slowly...slowly until all the air comes out."*

**WATER (Saliva= Relaxation, control)<sup>3</sup>**

Say: *"**The third element is WATER.** Notice the saliva in your mouth. Our mouth is like a little pool of water. When we're very frightened the pool is dry. When there's water in our little pool, that's a sign that we're relaxed and we're in control of our thoughts and our bodies. Now we'll learn how to fill our little pool with the saliva that's in our mouths. You don't have to work hard to do that. Just notice how the saliva comes by itself into your mouth. Imagine that you're eating chocolate or something else that you like to eat and feel how more and more saliva comes into your mouth. Little by little you can learn to fill the pool more and more. Try now for a few minutes. You can continue filling your pool while we proceed to the next stage".*

**FIRE (Firing or lighting up the imagination into a good place)**

Say: *"**Now, let's focus on the element of FIRE\light which stands for firing and/ or lighting up the imagination into a good place.** Imagine yourself with someone<sup>4</sup> you love, someone who*

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<sup>3</sup> Dr Esquadero, a Spanish physician, taught his clients to create saliva to ignore the pain when he operated without anesthesia

<sup>4</sup> To be with someone you feel loved or protected is a SRC (Social Resource Connection) of Yair Emanuel.

*makes you feel relaxed and safe. You may also imagine a place where you feel really good, where you really love to be”.*

Drawing of the Safe/Calm Place/ Resource

Say: *“Now go to the table and draw a picture of the good place or good calming person that you love to be with that you imagined Draw that picture on page number 1”.*

The children are invited to go to the outer circle for the drawing process.

### **THE BUTTERFLY HUG**

The children are invited to the inner circle with their resource drawing.

Say: *“Put the picture on the floor in front of you and look at it. Notice what you are feeling as you look at it and where you feel it in your body. Now let's do what we call the Butterfly Hug”.*

The leader demonstrates how to do the Butterfly Hug with slow taps.

Say, *“This is like a soft touch of someone who really has a pleasant relaxing hug? mommy or daddy's hug, a good loving hug”* (this is an ‘attachment cue’).

The children do the Butterfly Hug together with the leader about 10 taps.

### **NAME**

Say: *“Now think of a name or a title to your picture. This can be a one-word name or a sentence”.*

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(Electronic Journal- EMDR Israel, August 2006)

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The children go briefly to the outer circle to write the name and return with the resource drawing to the inner circle. The group leader and the facilitators may help the children who need it. It can be another opportunity to create a personal contact and to check if there are children who could not find safe cueing words.

### **STRENGTHENING THE 4 ELEMENTS EXERCISE**

Say: *“Look at your “Imma bracelet” and stretch it. Notice the tension in your body and rate it from 0 to 10, 10 being very, very strong and 0 no tension at all. Is there a difference from the beginning of the exercise? Did you succeed in lowering your tension even a little bit? by even one number? If so, good for you! If it didn’t change it is O.K., you are now practicing how to do it”.*

### **TRAUMA PROCESSING**

Focusing on the Safe/Calm Place/ Resource<sup>5</sup>.

Say: *“Look once more at the picture that you drew of something positive (the resource). You can look at it whenever you want to”.*

**(The drawing of the safe/calm place will remain on the table besides each group member through out the whole process).**

### **PHASE 3 - ASSESSMENT**

#### **FIRST DRAWING – THE DISTURBING PICTURE**

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<sup>5</sup> The option of looking at the resource whenever you want creates a dialectical movement between the resource and the traumatic memory.

Say: *“Now I would like each one of you to think of a disturbing or frightening situation that happened recently. An example might be a siren or an explosion. Notice what feels most frightening or makes you feel sad or angry as you think of that disturbing situation. Notice if a picture comes into your mind that is very unpleasant to remember. What do you see? What do you hear? Perhaps the picture also brings with it a particular, unpleasant smell. Notice how you feel now in your body as you remember that picture. Now each one of you can sit at the table in the outer circle to draw whatever comes into your mind on page number 1”.*

The children are invited to the outer circle for the drawing process.

## **SUD**

Say, *“Look at the picture that you drew and write on it how much it disturbs you now. 10 is the highest disturbance and 0 means that it doesn't bother you at all. Put a little square around the number that you've written* (to separate it from the drawing)

The leader and the facilitators help the children to note the SUDs while they are drawing.

## **PHASE 4 - DESENSITIZATION**

### **TAPPING<sup>6</sup>**

The children are invited to return to the inner circle with their first drawing of a disturbing event.

Say: *“Now we'll learn to tap on our knees. Put your picture on the floor in front of you. Put one hand on each knee and begin to tap slowly, first on one knee, then on the other. Follow your hands with your eyes back and forth...until something new comes into your mind. Now*

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<sup>6</sup> It is advisable to differentiate between the Butterfly Hug for resource installation and the tapping with eye movement for the trauma processing.



*we'll start.* (Tracking with the eyes can be avoided for young children. Often the children watch their mates and thus connect to a group resource of holding presence).

The leader taps with the children up to twenty times. (The number of taps can be changed according to the rhythm of the group and the age of the children).

*Now take a deep breath as we have learned...slowly... slowly..."*

## **SECOND DRAWING**

The children are invited to go to the outer circle for the next drawing process.

Say: *"Now go to the table and draw the picture that now comes into your mind on page number 2. When you've finished drawing, write the number between 0 and 10 that describes how disturbing that picture is to you now. Put a little square around the number that you've written".*

## **TAPPING**

The children are invited to return to the inner circle with their second drawing.

Say: *"Put the picture on the floor in front of you. Look at it then begin drumming slowly..... Move your eyes back and forth as you follow the hand that is tapping, until something new comes into your mind.*

The leader taps about 20 times

Say, *"Now take a deep breath...as we learned, slowly..."*

## **THIRD DRAWING**

The children are invited to go to the outer circle for the drawing process.

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Say: *“Now draw the new picture that comes into your mind on page number 3. When you've finished drawing, write the number between 0 and 10 that describes how disturbing that picture is to you now. Put a little square around the number that you've written”.*

#### **TAPPING**

The children are invited to return to the inner circle with their third drawing.

Say: *“Put the third picture on the floor, . Look at it and begin tapping slowly.....Move your eyes from side to side, following the hand that is drumming until something new comes up.*

*The leader taps about 20 times*

Say, *“Now take a deep breath.... slowly... “*

#### **FOURTH DRAWING**

The children are invited to go to the outer circle for the drawing process.

Say: *“Now draw the picture that came into your mind in page number 4. When you finish, note the number between 0-10 that describes how disturbing the picture feels. Put a little square around the number that you've written”*

#### **TAPPING**

The children are invited to return to the inner circle with their fourth drawing.

Say: *“Put the fourth picture on the floor. Look at it and begin tapping slowly.....Move your eyes from side to side, following the hand that is drumming until something new comes up.*

*The leader taps about 20 times*

Say, *“Now take a deep breath.... slowly... “*

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## **RETURN TO THE FIRST PICTURE**

Say: *“Now look again at the first picture that you drew on page 1 and write on it how disturbing it feels to you now between the numbers 0-10. Put a little square around the number that you've written.”*

## **PHASE 5 - INSTALLATION**

### **FUTURE RESOURCE – (FIRE/IMAGINATION)**

Say: *“Close your eyes and think about one month from now...maybe a year... or even more...and imagine how things will look when everything is over. How would you like to see yourself in the future? Everyone can draw on page number 6 the picture of this time to come, your good future that you want to see”*

For young children or those who need more direction, the leader can ask them to draw “the good future they would like to see”.

### **A POSITIVE SENTENCE**

Say: *“Look at the picture of the time to be, your future, and choose a positive sentence for it, or a word, and write the sentence/word on the picture”.*

*The leader and the facilitators walk around and help the children who need it.*

### **GROUP RESONANCE**

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The children are invited to return to the inner circle. The group leader asks them to make a group puzzle out of the drawings.

Say: *“Each of you can put your future drawing in the center of the circle and all the drawings together will create a big sun-shaped puzzle”.*

**Then they are asked to sit.**

Say: *“Now each one of you will share with us his/her positive, good and strength giving word/sentence.”* This group echoing creates a collective resonance of coping.

Say: *“Now we will all do together the Butterfly Hug while each of you will bring up the positive future drawing and the positive sentence/word relating to the future”.*

In an ongoing crisis situation, the group leader may add positive sentences that strengthen coping and relative safety like:

Say, *“Up until now I have been coping”*,

Say, *“Up until now I am safe”*,

Say, **“I know now how to calm myself”**,

Say, **“Whatever has happened is over”**.

## **PHASE 6 – BODY SCAN**

### **BUTTERFLY HUG**

Say: *“Now let’s finish together with the butterfly hug while each one of you looks at your future picture, which is a part of a big puzzle. Notice how you feel in your body”.*

The group leader taps about 10 times.

The leader looks at each child in turn (he may call their names). This repetition enhances recognition and relaxation. The leader asks: *“Notice if your body feels pleasant- unpleasant,*

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*calm-tensed, nothing-something*” If someone feels distress the leader says: “*Let’s tap a bit more until something will change...*” Personal attention and emphasis on the body are important for closure and creating the group container. (children who remained somewhat distressed physically will receive personal attention at the end of the group process)

## **PHASE 7 - CLOSURE**

Say: “*We reached the end of our meeting and I want to tell you that you worked very well. Remember your bracelet, or your sticker, so that you can lower your tension whenever you want to with the 4 elements. We will finish with the train. Tell me what song you know which brings you hope for a good future*”.

The children are asked to stand one behind the other like a train and to put their hands on the shoulders of the child in front of them. They tap all together as they sing the songs they have suggested. **The group moves together in a group dance singing the chosen song of hope and strength.**

## **PHASE 8 - FOLLOW UP**

The way that a child responds is diagnostic, so it is important to identify those who showed unusual or non-cooperative responses.

Follow up would include all the children who had participated to check if the change is stable.

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**Audio recording available from EMDRIA Conference:**

**Esti Bar Sade:**

Early Trauma: revisited and revised through EMDR, the narrative story and the implementation of attachment theory. EMDR Europe Conference, Copenhagen, 2003

**Audio-visual**

**Brurit Laub:**

Various Uses of Connections to Resources Within and Without the Standard EMDR Protocol –EMDR international conference Vancouver, 2003

The healing power of resource connection in the standard EMDR protocol. EMDR conference, Istanbul, 2006

Dialectical perspective in EMDR therapy: Theory and practice. Edinburgh, 2014,

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