

The following is an example of the use of the Conference Room. It was the first time this client whom I will call Ann and I had used it. She is a woman in her late forties who grew up in a high conflict family. Her parents fought a lot, especially until she was 8. Her father, a pastor, had affairs until they moved to another state when she was 8. Her mother was emotionally destroyed much of the time by this and often beat the two older siblings with a paddle in a rage. Her father used the paddle as well. My client tried to be perfect and also absorbed mom's shame and hopelessness as a woman. She has huge issues of fear of rejection and feeling inadequate. She is a devout Christian. She drove a distance to see me.

### **The Conference Room**

I explained the idea and physical representation of a conference room giving her some leeway to define it. There were large conference chairs. I indicated the obscure hallway and a listening room for anyone who only wanted to listen.

A It's quite a crowd. There is a large room with lots of stuffed chairs and a chaise lounge. There are big windows on one side with light colored curtains. There is dark mahogany paneling with detailed woodwork. There is a thick red carpet and a huge fireplace. A lovely bouquet of fresh flowers is on the mantle.

[In the opposite of the usual order she tells me ages from older to younger.]

A There is a young adult me, 19, on a gray blue chair.  
16 year old me. She's on the chaise lounge.  
12 year old me is crouched by the fireplace.  
11 year old me is seated next to the mirror wondering if her breasts will ever grow, if anyone will ever love her.  
10 year old me who's angry is seated cross-legged on the floor.  
7 year old me...

F *[I introject]* showing what emotion?

A Is lying on her belly with her face in her arms, very sad.  
4 year old me is hugging her knees, very afraid.  
3 year old me is trying to find someone to hold her.

F Who would enjoy holding her?

A I'll hold her. [This turns out later to be the 33 year old.]

F Is there anyone else there or in the listening room?

A Everyone is in the room. The 33 year old me is sitting at the piano.

F Is that everyone? (yes). I introduce myself:

*I'm Farns Lobenstine. I'm a therapist or counselor and I've been working with adult Ann for the past several months. Does everyone know that they grew up to be adult Ann, who is 48 and who is the mother of a 20-year-old daughter and a 17-year-old son?*

A Yes

F 3 year old Ann, I would like you to come over to adult Ann and put your hand up against her hand. Do you see how big her hand is? I'd like you both to stand up and see how tall grown up Ann is. I'd like everyone to compare their height and hand size.

*I sense there is a strong need for strength to handle all this and I suggest we all sing a hymn together. This has been helpful several times before. I begin singing Be Thou My Vision and Ann and I sing with all of her ego states.*

*I then tell everyone why I asked them all to come forward today.*

Grown up Ann has been experiencing a lot of fear of rejection by men in the last few months and we want to work with the child and adolescent parts who have felt this." [The agenda here is to work directly with the ego states which are triggering her in the present, and to meet their needs so that adult Ann can be more functional and present, in church especially.]

19 I'm at XYZ School of Music and I'm very proud to be there. 90% of the students are men! So I get a lot of attention. I finally met a guy I really liked, the first person I connected with on an intellectual level. He was also attractive. We hit it off. It was my very first real relationship. I don't know what happened. He started to talk all of the time about his old girlfriend who was better because she was Italian. One day he slapped my thigh and said, "You're really out of shape. Maybe you need to lose some weight." I

weighed 115 lbs. [She's 5'5""] For him I allowed myself 2 bites of food a day and lost weight. I was never good enough. Then one night he told me he wasn't sure of the relationship. I told him I wanted to throw myself off the roof we were on. He told me, "You're crazy. You need help." Then he said, "Let's talk in a few weeks." Several weeks after that I went to his house to get a textbook and he was in bed with an Italian girl. *I thought I was crazy. Why would I want to let a relationship make me want to die?* That's my story.

F Are there any much younger parts who want to speak about fearing rejection by men? [*I'm looking for the origin of the childhood folder named I'm unlovable (or some similar belief), the Touchstone Event.*]

7 I'm the 7 year-old me. I'm watching my mom who is feeling very rejected. Will I be unlucky like her? Will Dad leave us for someone else because he doesn't love us anymore? And I'm afraid of rejection by mom because she gets really mean sometimes. That's my story.

F Any other young parts?

4 I'm the 4 year old me. I'm afraid a lot.

F Of what?

4 I'm afraid of being hit. I hate it when my brother (4 years older) gets hit. He gets hit really hard with the paddle. I wonder, "Will it break him?" I love him but he hates me. I don't know why but he does. I wish he'd be my friend and look out after me and keep me safe. But he's really mad and he hurts me. I feel very hated and very scared.

F Would you like a hug?

4 That's OK?

F And if you are so scared, what would it feel like to be held?

4 Good

F Is there a part that would really enjoy holding 4 year old?

- A The 33 year old loves children and has a 3 year old in her lap.
- F Would the 3 year old in your lap be willing to share your [her] story?
- 3 I don't remember much. The boys hate me. [Neighborhood boys.] I just wanted to be friends.
- F How old were they?
- 3 10, 11, 7, 8
- F How do they hate you?
- 3 They pretend to be nice but then they hurt me.
- F How?
- 3 They pulled down my pants and they laughed at me and they poked me and it hurt. I just want to put my clothes on and run home.
- F What did happen?
- 3 I don't remember.
- F *[referencing the present tense she speaks in]* You just got stuck in that moment. What if you told mom or dad?
- 3 I wouldn't know how. They probably wouldn't believe me or have time to hear me.
- F How does it feel now to have us believe you and to have [33-year-old] Ann hold you?
- 3 It's good.
- F Can you look eye to eye at your grown up self?
- 3 Her eyes are nice. They're not mean.

F What's it like to know that that happened a very long time ago. Ann is now 48 years old. Those boys can never hurt you again.

3 I'm no longer afraid of those silly boys who do dumb things.

F And what can 48 year old Ann tell you about whose fault it was that that happened?

A It's not your fault. They were mean and stupid. It's OK to want to be friends.

F And what can 48 year old Ann tell you about what's special about having a vagina and a womb?

A We can have babies.

F Can boys do that?

A No

F 3 year old, what's it like to hear these words?

3 It's good. It means I am special.

F And how do you feel now?

3 Better and safe. But I don't trust boys.

F Do you have any ideas about whether you trust your Daddy or other men?

3 I don't know him very well, but I love him. He's funny sometimes.

*[I knew we had extra time if we needed it. It's now 11:10.]*

F It's almost time to tuck in. Does anyone else want to say something? Is there an older part who would enjoy taking 3 year old?

19 Yes, I will.

F It's time to tuck in. I want to thank you all for being present. Now I want you all to go to someplace safe, perhaps to sleep or to play in a playroom or outside. [The implicit message is so you don't mess with Adult Ann's life.]

A They've left.

F Now I want you to get up from your chair, leave the Conference Room. From the landing, I want you to go down the steps as I count from 1 to 10, becoming more present one tenth of the way with each number. *[At 5 or 6 she hasn't stirred at all and I talk a lot more.]* Feel the wood steps and banister. Notice your breathing. 8 Notice the traffic outside. 9 Transition back to my office in the cape house I live in. 10 Open your eyes.

### **Re-evaluation**

A It was interesting. I had the feeling I have after feeling rejected. I condemn myself for seeking friendship. It was interesting that I heard myself say, "There is nothing wrong with wanting to be friends with someone." It's OK to let someone know you're interested in them. *[She continues to look for an adult partner.]*

F You had many scary experiences. And you unconsciously took on your mother's profound sense of rejection.

F I offered, and she declined as unneeded, her Container and Safe Place.

### **The following week's re-evaluation of the Conference Room**

A It was pretty clear well-known stuff. I feel there is a piece I'm not remembering. I struggle with the belief that my pain is not legitimate. I have lots of shame. I was told so often, "Oh, you're so lucky to grow up in a lovely Christian family." So I believed it must be my perceptions. I wonder if it is OK, legitimate to face my past in therapy or am I just whiny? *[A friend always discounts Ann's experience of Ann's own childhood, believing her own abuse was real and Ann's was nothing.]* If I knew (she suspected she may have been sexually abused by her brother, 5 years older, and in the session before the Conference Room processing had suddenly stopped with the sudden appearance of seeing her 10-year-old (?) brother's penis. And in a later session Ann remembered her sister, 3 years older, had told her 10

years ago that she had been sexually abused by him) If I knew the piece I'm not remembering, I would feel my pain is legitimate.

F You have had LOTS OF TRAUMA! *[I review some of it.]* Your pain is so legitimate and understandable.

*I give her a detailed review of our work and where I think we will go next. We have done EMDR and made some steady progress and have now hit a wall. (Hence the Healing Circle and now the conference room.) We set up a core target memory when she was 4 and her sister, 7, was beaten and made to be topless because she had dirtied her blouse, and are still processing it. Her NC is "I'm defective."*

This client gave me permission to type up these sessions as a way of teaching others about the Conference Room and was pleased to be offered a copy.

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## Conference Room

*I used CD and tappers throughout.*

*Victorian home*

*Climb stairs and enter the conference room and find a comfortable chair.*

*Obscure hallway.*

*I invite the part or parts that brought up the creepy man feelings on Saturday at the seminar and again on Sunday in church when she cried.*

*Long pause*

A No one is coming.

[She's been feeling lots of shame.]

F So, speaking to all of the parts of the self, I'd like to invite those parts that carry shame to come into the room. [Making allowances for shame, I add] You can hide.

A A little girl is hiding behind a chair. She doesn't want to be seen.

F *[I introduce myself. Then I say]* Hello Little Girl (LG). I'm glad you're here. Do you know that you grew up to be Ann, an adult and mother of a 17 and 20 year old?

LG Yes.

F What can I call you?

LG Shadow

F What is your job? How do you try to help grown up Ann?

LG I keep her from exposing the bad stuff.

F Sounds like a lot of hard work. A really hard job that's kept you from being a child.

LG I don't know any other thing.

F How old are you, Shadow?

LG I think I'm four, but I'm not sure.

F It must be scary to be so young and have such a hard job. If we could make it easier on you, would that interest you? [This question has proved to be a very powerful way to get a part's attention and to consider allying with you.]

LG But I can't let the bad stuff be known. I don't even know it myself. But if people knew...

F And what is the worst thing that could happen if people knew?

LG They would see Ann in a different light, differently.

F And?

LG She would be weak and vulnerable. They would think she's icky.

F Did you see her crying throughout the service on Sunday?

LG Yes

F And what was that like for her?

LG Yes, weak and vulnerable.

F So it seems like you're trying to protect her from something she felt anyway.

LG Yea

F What do you need? How can we help you?

LG I want to wash this ickyness away and I can't.

F Do you know where the ickyness came from?

LG No

F Do you think it's connected to all of the fighting between your mom and your dad?

LG It doesn't feel like it.

F Is it connected to what those older boys did to you, making you undress and making fun of you, when all you wanted to do was be their friend?

LG Maybe, but there's a creepy man and he's mean. But that's all I can remember.

F That sounds very scary.

LG I don't want anyone to see me like that, the way he saw me. He hated me. I wasn't worth anything. I was just garbage. I don't know if he told me I was awful or I just knew that.

F Do you remember where you saw him or met him? Do you remember if you were inside or outside?

LG I think it was outside by the church. I used to play over there a lot.

F Are you willing to go back there with a helper?

LG I'm kind of there now. [So I didn't find someone to help her. Given her age this might have been a big mistake.]

F Are you alone or with someone else?

LG I'm alone.

F Tell me exactly what is happening.

LG I take bottle caps and I make pies with dirt.

F Sounds like a fun project for a four year old. Tell me what else happened.

LG I can't remember anything else. It's all so confused.

F I want you to know this is only a memory and it happened more than forty years ago. Can you believe that?

LG Yea.

F And what difference does it make if it's only a memory and it happened more than 40 years ago?

LG It's old. And it shouldn't matter anymore. I think he smoked cigarettes.

F Can you picture what he was wearing or what the weather was like?

LG No...maybe a white shirt, dark hair,

F You're working really hard and this way we can help you. What else do you remember?

Did he seem like a stranger or someone you knew from the church?

LG: think he was someone from the church.

F Did he talk to you?

LG I don't remember.

F Did he touch you or just look at you in a really ugly way.

LG I don't know. Why can't I remember?

F It happened a really, really long time ago.

F And what do you want to say to him?

LG I'm just a little girl. I'm not dirty. I'm not icky. I don't even understand this. It's not me...

F Would you like me to tell him first??

LG Yes

F Listen man, my friend Ann is just a little girl. You know that because she's having fun making pies with bottle caps. She's a very sweet girl. She is not dirty or icky. And you have no right making her feel dirty. Do you understand?

What's it like for me to tell him off?

LG It's nice to have someone to protect me.

F Well, grown up Ann and I would be very happy to protect you. Knowing that we're protecting you, can you now tell him?

LG I'm just a little girl. It does feel good but I'm not supposed to feel those feelings now because I'm just a little girl. It doesn't make me feel icky but I do feel icky.

F Is there anything else you want to tell that man?

LG You're evil. You're bad. Why would you do this to a little girl and tell her that she's the icky one.

F: That's right. *[I use a strong voice in these statements to encourage her to feel we are stronger than the man is.]* Is there anything else you want to tell him?

LG Go away and leave me alone.

F *[Loudly]* Yes, man, go way and leave her alone!

F What other parts of Ann do you know?

LG I know all of her.

F So I would like to talk with a part that would like to help 4-year-old Shadow, a part that would enjoy helping her. Is there an older part?

26 year old announces her presence.

F Say, "I'm here" when you're ready.

26 I'm here.

F 26 year old, what do you want to tell Shadow?

26 That man told you lies. It's not true. He had no business telling you it's your fault. You're just a little girl and I'm going to protect you.

F Shadow would you like 26 year old to give you a hug?

LG Yes

F And what is happening now?

26 I'm holding her.

F Shadow, how does that feel?

LG Good

F Shadow, how do you feel now?

LG Better

F So did anything terrible happen because you remembered what happened?

LG No

F That's good to know. And does it feel like you can begin to let go of the shame now that you've told the story.

LG I want to.

F And do you have any ideas on how we can help you let go of the shame?

LG I just need to be reminded it's not me, the ickyness. I wish it wouldn't have happened. It was wrong.

F I need you to know something. And I need the 26 yr old to remind you of this. Even when children are being abused, sexually abused, it's normal that it can feel good. And that's one of the cruel ways that grown ups hurt children because they tell them that they liked it or that it was their fault. Your body just works that way and you didn't like it for one second. It's the way God made you, but you weren't supposed to know about that part until much later. What's it like to hear me say that?

LG It makes me feel a little better.

F 26 yr old, what else do you want to tell Shadow?

LG You're not dirty or icky. You're just a little girl. Somebody did something to you that they shouldn't have. That doesn't change who you are. You are still a sweet little girl.

F Shadow, where are you right now. I'll bet you're not still hiding behind that chair.

LG No, I'm sitting on a grown-up's lap.

F And I'm wondering if you're ready to adopt a different name, now that you don't have to hide anymore.

LG Well, my real name is Ann.

F Would you like to be called Ann?

LG Yes

F How does that feel?

LG It feels good.

F Can you look in 26 yr old in the eyes and tell her, "My name is Ann?"

LG My name is Ann.

F And what do you think 26 will say back?

LG know. I'm you. You're me.

F 4 yr old, does this help you know you really grew up? It happened a very long time ago.

LG Yes

F Let's find a safe place to put or bury all this shame that you've carried around for so long. Can you help her 26 yr old?

26 Yes, we can use the container.

F So tell me when you're done and if you need help, 26 yr old.

LG OK It's put away.

F And 26 yr old, how does 4 yr old look now?

26 The color is back in her cheeks. Her eyes aren't so dark.

F And 4 yr old, are you ready to play some games?

LG Yea

F And then tuck in someplace cozy and safe?

LG Yea

F And 26 yr old will you play some games with her and then tuck her in?

26 Yes

F Is there any part that has a need to say something before we stop for today?

A No.

F Adult Ann, I'm turning off the tappers. I'd like you to get up and go to the door.

Yes, open it. Now come down the stairs from 1 to 10. Come back to my office.  
10. Open your eyes. Describe the flowers.

### Re-evaluation

F What was that like for you?

A Really strange.

F Is there some small sense of resolution.

A Yes. I do feel a sense of putting it away.

F How's your body now?

A Very calm and relaxed.

F Quite different than yesterday at church?

A Yes, definitely.

F We've talked about your sense that something sexual happened and that you didn't really have an abuse story to tell because you couldn't identify it. [This incident clearly seems to be one of sexual abuse.] Yet I've underscored that all of the conflict and fighting between your parents was a long story of abuse.

A It still feels vague.

F But you began today with pie making with bottle caps.

A I haven't thought of that in a very long time.

F Perhaps this shame is connected with your mother's shame you took on.

A But that stamp of shame has never felt like my mother.

F I never heard you say that before.

A Like I've been stamped with indelible ink on your soul.

F That is often how sexual abuse is experienced.

A These men (2 brothers at church and 1 of them at the gym with friends of his) really seem to trigger that awful man, especially the guy at the gym I don't know. He gives me the creeps, the willies. Very few people make me feel that way. There's a hatred. And I feel this sense it was the same kind of person, this evil...I feel he looks at me that way – creepy.

F I hope you can now be more disconnected from that look.

A I think last week realizing this misogynist thing with that family of the 2 brothers was clarifying. Now at the gym, I no longer feel something is terribly wrong with me, like when one of the brothers was coming near me. I felt like I caused it. Now I'm going to the gym, I'm making friends, having conversations. I've talked with other attractive men. It's been an eye opener. It's not me!! I've been attracted to several men at the gym and we talked and it hasn't been weird. [All apparently since our last session.]

F Hurray

Do you need to use the container as the adult?

A No

Underlined questions and comments are from Gordon Emmerson, *Ego State Therapy*, (2003) Crown House Publishing, pp. 37-45.