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[Home](#) > Guided Imagery

Guided Imagery

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You now know several techniques, based on CBT, and this will be the last one of the set. As the name suggests, guided imagery is a relaxation technique, with your imagination at its core.

There are some techniques, which are usually applied with the help of a therapist, but you can also use on your own if you are careful. Guided imagery uses the potential of one's imagination to influence, in a positive manner, a variety of psychological, and even physiological disorders.

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Guided Imagery

Simply put, it is about visualizing relaxing, soothing scenes. Guided imagery is usually conducted with the help of a therapist, practitioner, or teacher, who serves as the guide. A lot of times, the guide uses pre-written scripts, with certain highly descriptive scenarios, which detail various sensations. The scenarios may also be modified, to help each client feel comfortable.

After the initial session, counselors may encourage their clients to try the technique by themselves. The central concept is that the ideas we involuntarily imagine, are strong influences on our physical and mental health. Therefore, by voluntarily changing those images, we can also change our perceptions and improve our well-being. Positive images and imagined experiences have the power to relax us, soothe our racing minds, help us sleep,

alleviate sadness and negativity.

This method is used to help people with anxiety, depression, chronic pain and, of course, sleep disorders. It's efficient, simple and provides individuals with a way to cope with built up stress.

Self-Guided Imagery

Although guided imagery is usually performed with the help of a trained specialist, if you are careful and conscientious, you can also try it on your own. For the process to go as smoothly as possible, make sure you plan your self-guided image ahead of time, be patient with yourself, and base your practice on kindness and positivity. This may all sound a bit abstract, which is why you can find more specific instruction below.

Apply Self-Guided Imagery

Choose Your Place and Time

Select settings and time of the day, where you'd be able to relax and won't be interrupted by any person or noise, while engaging in the exercise. This is a time to relax completely and get lost in your imagination, which is why any interruptions or discomfort can be detrimental. Start by lying down, or sitting if you prefer, with your eyes closed.

Concentrate on Your Breath

Take slow, deep, steady breaths. Inhale for about 3 to five seconds; hold for a few seconds; exhale for about 3 to 5 seconds; hold for another few seconds and inhale again. It may help to imagine that you're blowing out a candle but don't want its flame to fade out - that's the pace you want to achieve with this relaxed breathing. Remember to keep your breathing's rhythm steady.

Breathe in, Breathe out

Symbolically, breathe in serenity, as you inhale, and breathe out all of your tension, as you exhale. Try to imagine your breath with as many senses as possible – feel the sweet taste of the inhale, and the bitterness of negativity exit your body as you exhale; imagine inhaling as having light, soothing colors enter your body, and exhaling as a dark cloud exiting it, etc. Being able to imagine your breath in such ways may take a while, so for now, the most important thing you can do is concentrate on the first sentence of this paragraph.

Tune in with Your Body

While engaging in the breathing exercise, you're likely to feel relaxed. Concentrate on how your body becomes relaxed and feels somewhat heavy. Focus on all of the sensations you are experiencing, good or bad, and let them pass through you, without letting any of them pin you down.

Picture a Pleasant Place

Once your thoughts start to clear, picture settings you find pleasant. “Go to your happy place”, as they say, or invent one. Is it a green, cool forest? A warm sunny beach? Perhaps, it’s sitting in front of a fireplace in a cozy cabin. Whatever setting you choose, make sure it’s something that attracts you and makes you feel good. You can change settings every time you try this technique.

Go into Detail

Now that you’ve chosen your scene, describe and feel it, with as many details as possible: picture every little fragment of the settings, and make sure you only choose positive stimuli and descriptions. Ask yourself some fundamental questions, such as: What does it smell like? How is the lighting? Is there any background music playing? What sounds do you hear? What shapes and colors do you see?

Once you have answered those questions, go into further detail. For instance, if you are imagining sitting in front of a fireplace, describe the rug you are sitting on – its material, colors, how it feels on your body; picture the flickering flames – their color, how they disintegrate the wood into beaming red charcoals, how the warmth licks your skin, etc.

Lose Yourself

Lose yourself in that place for a while. Just before you begin, set an alarm, with a sweet and serene sound, for no less than 15 minutes. This way you won’t get distracted by looking at the clock, and you’d be able to enjoy your guided imagery. Make sure that your guided imagery includes all senses and plenty of emotions. Describing it in more detail will provide a more realistic representation.

What If It’s Too Hard?

If you’re not used to meditation or haven’t tried any visualization exercises before, this technique will probably feel very silly at first. You may laugh or feel a bit annoyed, but don’t get discouraged or beat yourself up – most people feel silly at first. Just keep at it and slowly try to channel that “happy place”.

Another way to start is to use music. Maybe you already have a particular tune that soothes you or reminds you of pleasant sensations. Play it, close your eyes and breathe while focusing just on that.

Alternatively, you can try using one of the numerous videos and recordings; that can be found by typing in the words “guided meditation” or “guided imagery” into a video search engine. It may take a while before you locate the recording that soothes you best, but, if nothing else, at least it will help you tune into the idea of self-guided imagery.

Remember, your mind has the power to stress you out and the power to relax you; use it.

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