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Guided Imagery

A Mindfulness Meditation Technique

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Guided imagery is an excellent mindfulness meditation technique for managing worry, stress, and anxiety as well as physical and mental tension. Research shows that guided imagery is a mental strategy with major physiological and psychological benefits. Use this tool to decelerate racing thoughts and invite a sense of calm and well-being to both your mind and body.

This worksheet provides a “script” for steps that you can take to lead yourself through a guided imagery practice. It is perfectly okay to use this script flexibly, change it up and add your own details. In fact, the more details you add the more effective your practice will be!

How it’s done:

- Lay on your back with your knees bent or sit in a chair with your legs uncrossed.
- Begin by closing your eyes and paying attention to your breath. Breathe in through your nose expanding the diaphragm muscle fully, deep into the bottom of your lungs. Imagine that your belly is a balloon that you are filling with air. *(See additional handout for more tips on diaphragmatic breathing.)*

- Create a slow and steady pattern with your breaths. Practice by counting, “One diaphragm, two diaphragm, three diaphragm” in and, “One diaphragm, two diaphragm, three diaphragm” out until you form a new natural rhythm.
- Imagine that you are in a peaceful place near a body of moving water such as a forest with a nearby stream or a sandy beach by the ocean.
- Envision the setting with as much detail as possible and with all of your senses. Imagine the temperature in the air, the feeling of the wind on your skin, and the texture of the ground on your bare feet. What sounds do you notice around you? Do you hear the wind rustling leaves around you or tall grasses on the dunes? Can you make out the gurgling of the stream or the gentle crash of waves in the distance? Mentally illustrate the colors in the sand, sky, or sunlight. How would you describe the patterns in the bark of the trees or shape of the sand on the shore? What fragrances are you taking in?
- See in your mind’s eye that you are walking towards the water’s edge. Pay attention to the scene around you with each step. Once you arrive, dip your toes into the water and imagine the sensation of the water against your skin.
- Notice now that you are holding something in your hand, perhaps flower petals or soft leaves. Try rubbing one of them between your fingers,



becoming aware of the colors and textures. These will serve an important purpose.

- At this time, expand your attention and allow your thoughts to flow freely into your mind. Some of your thoughts will reflect a sense of calm and comfort. Others will reflect worries, fears, struggles, and inner disquiet.
- We can choose which thoughts we hold on to and which ones we allow to pass through us. With each worry thought that comes to mind, imagine that you gently place it on a single leaf or petal and then release that leaf or petal into the water before you, allowing it to drift away.
- When we let go of worry thoughts we are doing something quite powerful. We are choosing *not* to wrestle with our thoughts or push them away. We are choosing *not* to surrender to our thoughts or eliminate them. Instead, we choose simply to recognize our thoughts as they come into our conscious awareness and, without struggle or suffering, allow them to pass.
- Stay in this place for as long as you need, mindfully repeating your practice whenever worry thoughts come into your experience.
- Whenever you are ready, slowly bring your awareness back to the present moment. Notice the weight of your body against the surface you are laying or sitting on. Notice sounds in the room around you or in the distance. With a deep inhale, gradually open your eyes. If you would like, take a moment to express gratitude toward yourself and your practice.
- To get the most out of your practice try to use guided imagery with diaphragmatic breathing for a minimum of four minutes. To keep track of time try setting a timer. Alternatively, you can cue at least four minutes of soothing music or nature sounds.
- Invite a friend or partner to your practice if you feel comfortable doing so and alternate reading scripts. There are also countless guided imagery recordings online or in mindfulness-based apps.



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- Feel free to walk yourself through the steps outlined here flexibly, adding your own details and fitting the steps to your own rhythm all along the way.
- Finally, yet importantly, enjoy your journey!

Helpful hits:

Living mindfully is to recognize what you are experiencing in the present moment without self-criticism or judgment. Apply these helpful hints to enhance your mindfulness practice:

- Thoughts are just thoughts. They come and go. We have little control over what we think and feel automatically and our automatic thoughts and feelings do not reflect who we are or the people we aim to be.
- Emotions and physical sensations are often important clues for what we need to feel nurtured, to heal, and grow.
- Use your breath as an anchor. If you find yourself easily distracted or pulled into worry thoughts, turn your attention to your breath. Notice the temperature of the air as it enters and is released from your nostrils and lungs. Feel your body slowly and gently expand and contract with each breath.
- Mindfulness takes courage because facing and accepting what we feel takes courage.
- Just like most practices, mindfulness is most effective when practiced regularly. To start, try setting aside 5-10 minutes at least three times weekly.
- For best results, practice early in the day or at the earliest signs of stress.

