

Visualization



Introduction

Our bodies and brains communicate with each other through chemical and electric signals. This means that when we think about stressful, frightening or upsetting things, our bodies begin to feel tense, our digestion becomes more difficult, and we have difficulties sleeping. The tension in our bodies then sends signals back to our brains that they are tense, which can increase our level of mental stress. We can break this cycle in the body with exercises like breathing, stretches or progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) or we can break it in the mind using mindfulness, visualization or grounding exercises. This handout will talk about visualization.

Visualization is a useful technique for breaking your stress cycle in your mind when your physical surroundings are contributing to your feelings of stress. Visualization gives you a break from your present setting, and with it, your present emotional state. There are many visualizations that you can do; in this handout we will discuss three simple techniques to get you started.

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Steps

For all of these visualizations, begin by sitting in a comfortable position, where your body and back are supported by a chair or the floor. Close your eyes if you are comfortable, or let them rest, unfocused, on a spot on the floor. Feel your feet solidly connected with the ground. Let your shoulders relax and release your jaw so that your mouth is slightly open. Take three deep breaths and pay attention to the feeling of the air coming in through your nose and filling your lungs, then releasing out through your mouth.

Calming color visualization



This is a simple visualization to start your practice with. The colors can help to relax your mind without bringing any associated thoughts with them. If you are finding that any color(s) are triggering for you or remind you of something upsetting, skip over that color. If any colors are particularly calming or comforting for you, spend more time with those colors.

	Start by focusing on the color red. Imagine this color in its many shades: dark red, bright red, pale red. Select your favorite shade of red and let that color spread across your mind's visual field, so that your whole mind is wrapped in that color. Enjoy this color Red.
	Now slowly allow the color red to shift to orange. Imagine this color in its many shades: dark orange, bright orange, pale orange. Select your favorite shade of orange and let that color spread across your mind's visual field, so that your whole mind is wrapped in that color. Enjoy this color Orange.
	Now slowly allow the color orange to shift to yellow. Imagine this color in its many shades: dark yellow, bright yellow, pale yellow. Select your favorite shade of

	yellow and let that color spread across your mind's visual field, so that your whole mind is wrapped in that color. Enjoy this color Yellow.
	Now slowly allow the color yellow to shift to green. Imagine this color in its many shades: dark green, bright green, pale green. Select your favorite shade of green and let that color spread across your mind's visual field, so that your whole mind is wrapped in that color. Enjoy this color Green.
	Now slowly allow the color green to shift to blue. Imagine this color in its many shades: dark blue, bright blue, pale blue. Select your favorite shade of blue and let that color spread across your mind's visual field, so that your whole mind is wrapped in that color. Enjoy this color Blue.
	Now slowly allow the color blue to shift to purple. Imagine this color in its many shades: dark purple, bright purple, pale purple. Select your favorite shade of purple and let that color spread across your mind's visual field, so that your whole mind is wrapped in that color. Enjoy this color Purple.
Now slowly allow all color to fade to white. Feel the white spread, surrounding your body with light. Take three deep breaths and when you are ready, open your eyes.	







Protective light visualization:

This visualization can be useful when you are feeling vulnerable. This could be a result of something that has happened in your day that made you feel unsettled or even hurt, or it could result from your exposure to someone else's overwhelming pain, grief, fear or trauma.

	As you breathe in, imagine white light shining on the top of your head. With each breath, imagine that light spreading down over your forehead and face, and the back of your head, then down your neck, over your shoulders and around your body.
	Breathe out and imagine that light expanding around you like a bubble, with your body inside. With each breath the bubble grows brighter and stronger. All the fear and pain is stuck outside the bubble. Inside the bubble you feel peaceful, calm and strong. Stay here as long as you need to, feeling the protection of your healthy boundaries, breathing in the cool white light, and letting anything painful or stressful float away from you, pushed outside the bubble.
When you are ready, take three deep breaths and open your eyes. Carry the image of your protective boundary with you throughout the rest of your day. This boundary does not mean that you do not care for others, but rather that you are able to keep yourself safe and strong so that you can support them.	

Nature walk visualization:

This visualization is good to refresh your body and mind. Chose a location that is peaceful and beautiful place for you: For some people this may be a forest, for some it may be some place near water, a beach or river, for some it may be the mountains, or even the desert. The important thing is that it is a place where you feel calm and happy.

	<p>Imagine yourself on a path in a nature place. The earth is soft beneath your feet. It is your favorite time of day and the light is shining gently around you, it feels pleasantly warm on your skin. As you breathe in you can smell the freshness in the air.</p>
	<p>You begin to walk along the path. The temperature is comfortable. You can hear the sounds of the place, of the breeze, maybe of birds. With each step you take along the path, you feel some of your worries and stress drop off behind you, all the weights of the day falling off onto the path behind you, and your body feels lighter and more relaxed. You can feel the muscles in your arms and legs stretching and lengthening comfortably. Your back and neck feel longer and straighter too, carrying less tension and weight.</p>
	<p>You admire the scenery around you, noticing all the things you love about this place: the colors of the sky and the land, the textures of the landscape, the plants and maybe animals. Your feet feel comfortable and supported as you step on the soft earth of the path.</p>
  	<p>Walk to a beautiful point in this place, a view that you love. Find a place that is comfortable and sit down to admire the beauty and peacefulness of this place. Notice the details of what you can see, what you can smell, what you can hear and what you can feel here. The breeze lightly brushing your skin. The sound of the wind or of the water near you. If you are in a forest, you can watch the leaves of the trees rustling in the wind and listen to the calls of the birds. If you are by water, you can watch the waves slowly moving and listen to the sound of the water over rocks or sand. If you are on a mountain, you can watch the clouds moving in the sky above you and listen to the sound of the wind. If you are in the desert, you can watch the colors of the sunset on the sand and the stars emerge, sparkling above you. You are safe and protected in this place. Stay here as long as you need to.</p>
<p>When you are ready, take three deep breaths, moving your fingers and toes slightly to awaken your body. Then slowly open your eyes. Take a moment to sit quietly as you adjust to returning to the world. Pay attention to the feeling of calm in your body and mind. You can carry the peacefulness and security of this place with you throughout the rest of your day.</p>	



References & Further Reading

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