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### An Introduction to Guided Imagery Techniques for At-Risk-Youth

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# Using Guided Imagery with At-Risk Youth

Lisa Skeens, Ph.D, MSW, LISW

# What is Guided Imagery?

- A wide variety of techniques where elements of the unconscious are invited to appear as images that can communicate with the conscious mind (Academy for Guided Imagery, 2014).

# Why do we use this technique?

- To help with mental health problems such as anxiety and depression
- To help with performance problems such as academic success or athletics
- To help with physical health problems
- To help increase personal motivation/visualization

# The History of Guided Imagery

- The technique has been used for a century-but research about the efficacy of the technique did not surface until the 70's from the medical profession.
- In the 20's-daydreams were utilized for visualization
- In the 40's-psychodrama was used to resolve personal problems
- In the 60's –desensitization and aversive imagery was used

# Important Research Studies

- Allergy reduction and increase of immune functions (Langewitz, Izakovic et al., 2005).
- Diabetes self-care improved, symptoms reduced (Wichowski & Jubsch, 1999).
- Reduction of stress hormone, cortisol, with obese Latino adolescents (Mandle & Jacobs, 1996).
- Cortisol levels reduced more with GIM than cognitive behavioral therapy with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (Jorm, Christensen, et al., 2004).

# Important Study for Educators

- SFGI-Solution Focused Guided Imagery is a method to help visualize accomplishing a goal within a limited time period.
- This can be used to help with academic or social problems with children.
- Visualizing a positive outcome can enhance goal attainment.

# A Significant SFGI Study for Educators

- A group from the University of Louisville developed and implemented a Solution Focused Guided Imagery Pilot Project:
    - 1. Identify a goal
    - 2. Visualize what life would be like without the problem
    - 3. Identify when there are exceptions to the problem
    - 4. Develop a baseline rating (pre and post)
    - 5. The facilitator should give written feedback for participant
- (Sklare, Sabella, Petrosko, 1997).



# Steps of GIM

- Relaxation (mental and physical)
- Body Mapping, Belly Breathing and Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Visualize a goal
- Explore barriers to goal
- Decide on “type” of imagery
- Identify objects, places that bring peace and sensory experiences
- Write script and practice

# Practice Relaxation

- Are you breathing correctly? Belly Breathing exercise
- Body Mapping-Where is the stress?
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise

# Visualize a goal

- What is one thing you would like to see different in your life?
- If you had a magic wish to change one thing-what would it be?
- Visualize how your life would like different if this change were to come to fruition.
- What do you see are the barriers to achieving this goal? This could be people, self-perception, the past, etc. (Discuss distorted thinking patterns of children and adults)

# Types of Guided Imagery Content

- Feeling State Imagery-changes mood and feelings. Do you want to change sadness or fear in your life?
- End State Imagery-Visualizing a concrete end to something-such as being cancer free, physically stronger, obtaining a high school diploma, etc.
- Energetic Imagery-Aspired from Chinese Medicine-visualizing positive energy flow in the body.

# Imagery Types-Cont'd

- Cellular Imagery-used with health issues-such as visualizing glucose being taken from the blood stream-cancer cells shrinking, etc.
- Physiological Imagery-Visualizing larger body symptoms changing such as visualizing airway passages opening with asthma or clearing of the arteries with heart disease.
- Metaphoric-Using symbols to represent reality. For example-darkness transforming to light, a tree growing, a caterpillar transforming to a butterfly, etc.

# Types of Imagery-Cont'd

- Psychological Imagery-Corrects emotional issues. Visualize loved ones around if grieving-or visualize having closure with a difficult relationship.
- Spiritual Imagery-Evokes peace and transcendent feelings. Visualize connecting to spirits, a larger power or a sense of belongingness and meaning (Napersteck, 2000).

# Experiential Scripts

- Listen to various guided imagery scripts

# Experiential Script Writing

- Group Script Exercise