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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-cancel 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