

## ***Week 4: Guided Imagery & Visualization*** ***Developed by The Center For Mind Body Medicine***

### **I. What is Imagery?**

Guided imagery is a form of deliberate and directed daydreaming, and uses all of the senses. The unconscious mind communicates information and inspiration to the conscious mind and to the body as well. Imagery makes thoughts vivid and is connected with many important functions in the brain.

### **II. Experiential Exercise: Lemon Imagery**

*To illustrate the effect of imagery on physiological processes, we will examine the process of eating a lemon*

The lemon imagery is a simple illustration of imagery's ability to trigger a physical response. Imagery pertains not only to visual images—that is, things you can see—but also to auditory images or sounds as well as images of smell, taste, movement and touch. Imagery brings about physiological changes because it activates parts of the brain virtually identical to those you experience in a real situation where you are actually seeing or hearing or smelling. When you imagine the lemon, for example, the optical cortex, that part of the your brain that is concerned with receiving sensory images though your eyes, is stimulated in much the same a way it would be if you actually saw a lemon.

The impact of images on brain activity opens up all kinds of possibilities for self-healing and improved immune functioning. We can use imagery to engage our parasympathetic nervous system and reduce our stress response.

Research has shown the usefulness of imagery in lowering blood pressure or heart rate, decreasing anxiety, improving mood and reducing the symptoms of PTSD. Imagery has also been shown to improve immune function for people with illnesses such as in cancer & HIV.

Guided imagery can be active or passive. **Active imagery** is when we use words and sometimes music to guide you through an imagery experience. **Passive imagery** is when images come to you spontaneously that are yours alone. Both active and passive imagery have an effect on your brain and body.

### **III. Experiential Exercise: Safe Place Imagery**

Just as negative images can provoke fear and distress, positive images can evoke warmth, relaxation, peace, and love. Because the body responds in essentially the same way to made-up imagery as it does to real experiences, positive healing images such as a relaxing safe place can be an effective tool for stress and pain management. Creating a safe or comfortable place provides a kind of mental and emotional time out.

#### **IV. Homework**

Please practice safe place imagery at home and write about your experience in your weekly reflections

- Think about how you might use the Safe Place Imagery at home?
- Use the Safe Place imagery regularly, either when you feel especially upset or agitated or simply at a certain time every day.
- You may go back to the same safe place or to a new safe place. Be open to whatever comes to you.
- Allow 15-20 minutes for this exercise when you begin to use it. With practice you may be able to find and enjoy the benefits of your safe place in far less time.
- Remember, if these exercises are difficult the first time, try again later. The more often you do it, the easier it will become. The work of guided imagery is about accepting the wisdom of your own unconscious.

