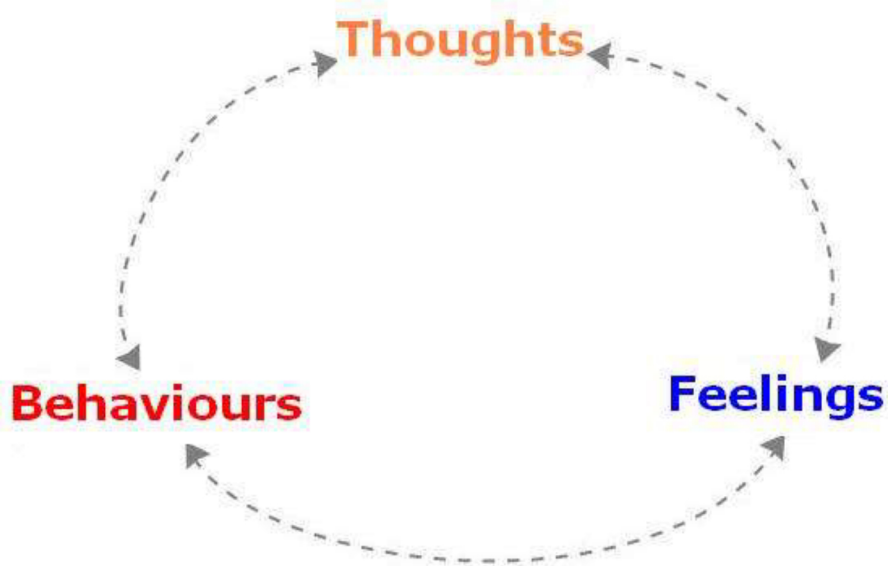


An Introductory Self-Help Course in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

Step Seven



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Step 7

Imagery

"Imagination is more important than knowledge" (Albert Einstein)



Imagery techniques and visualisation has long been used by most if not all cultures of the world, ancient and modern, and by most therapeutic approaches. Imagery is considered to be more effective when we are feeling relaxed.

Imagery can be used as a means to

- relax
- meditate
- improve future personal performance and development
- bring about future success
- gain confidence
- improve mood states
- reduce distress associated with traumatic memories
- gain understanding, insight, inner wisdom
- help overcome physical illnesses
- improve sports performance

Many of us think visually, or in pictures, and we can develop our perhaps natural imagery skills to benefit our mental health. We can practise situations in our imagination, or build our confidence, or maybe learn to relax using imagery.



Imagery for Self Help

Start each visualisation with relaxation by getting comfortable in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, and take a couple of minutes to focus on your breathing. Close your eyes, then mentally scan your body and become aware of any area where there is tension, and let that tension go with each out-breath.

- ❖ All visualisations can be strengthened by ensuring you engage all your senses in building the picture in your mind's eye - it's more than just 'seeing'! If you notice any negative links or images entering your positive imagery, then abort that image and think of something else.

Finish each visualisation by taking a few moments to bring yourself back into the room where you are, opening your eyes and looking around, sitting up, and bringing yourself back to alertness in the 'here and now'.

Relaxing 'Safe Place' Imagery



- ❖ Imagine a place where you can feel calm, peaceful and safe. It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere you've dreamt about going to, or maybe somewhere you've seen a picture of.
- ❖ Focus on the colours in your peaceful safe place.
- ❖ Now notice the sounds that are around you, or perhaps the silence.
- ❖ Think about any smells you notice there.
- ❖ Then focus on any skin sensations - the earth beneath you, the temperature, any movement of air, anything else you can touch.
- ❖ Now whilst you're in your peaceful and safe place, you might choose to give it a name, whether one word or a phrase that you can use to bring that image back, anytime you need to.
- ❖ You can choose to linger there a while, just enjoying the peacefulness and serenity. You can leave whenever you want to, just by opening your eyes and being aware of where you are now.



Wise Inner Advisor

- ❖ If you're unsure about something, or need some guidance, then we all have some form of wise inner part of us which knows.
- ❖ Start with relaxing Safe Place imagery, then you can imagine walking along a path a little way and noticing a "Wise Inner Advisor" - this might be an older person, a representation of another being, perhaps a religious or spiritual figure, or some other being. Use whatever feels right for you.
- ❖ Make the image stronger by focusing on the scene, what you can see, hear, smell, touch.
- ❖ Spend some time just being with your Wise Inner Advisor, feeling peaceful and comfortable.

- ❖ Take the opportunity to ask your Wise Inner Advisor for general guidance or for advice on a particular issue. Don't expect an immediate answer, but be receptive to whatever comes up.
- ❖ Some people notice in the following hours, days or weeks that they've received their "answer", perhaps in a very unexpected way.

Confident, Competent, Content



- ❖ We can use imagery to help us feel better about ourselves.
- ❖ Think of a situation or event in the past when you have strongly felt this way. Or think of a person (real or fictional) who has the qualities you desire.
- ❖ Think about that time, or that person - what do you see? What do you hear? How are you/they behaving? What do you/they look like? What do you hear? What else do you notice?
- ❖ What feelings do you notice as you imagine yourself at that time, or being that person? What do you feel now?
- ❖ What physical sensations do you notice?
- ❖ Can you think of a word which describes this good feeling, a word you can use to bring back this feeling whenever you need it?
- ❖ Now focus on that word with the image, and notice the feelings
- ❖ You are now able to bring back this positive feeling, whenever you want or need to.
- ❖ You can combine this technique with "Goal Rehearsal" and imagine yourself in a situation, with these positive feelings.



Goal Rehearsal / Achieving Future Success

- ❖ Consider, in detail, the trait, skill or behaviour you would like to achieve, in what situation, with whom etc.
- ❖ Rehearse the situation in the imagination, using the desired behaviours, skills etc. Imagine seeing yourself in that situation, as you want to be - what you look like, how you sound - what you're saying and how you say it, how you see yourself acting
- ❖ Anticipate others' responses to this new you - rehearse them responding in different ways, sometimes negatively - and then rehearse those difficult scenarios with yourself responding in the way you'd like to respond
- ❖ If necessary, prepare a script of what you want to say (e.g. when planning to stand up to someone in authority)
- ❖ Use this imagery several times a day, for a minimum of 10 days. The more you practise, the easier it becomes, and the easier you will find the actual situation when it happens.

For example, apprehension about a job interview

- ❖ Enact a detailed scene in the mind
- ❖ Use different scenarios of the situation - see yourself being introduced to the interviewer, and also taking the initiative and introducing yourself.
- ❖ Imagine being asked likely questions, and rehearse your responses

- ❖ See yourself looking calm and confident - imagine what that looks like, what you'll be doing, how you'll be doing it

Image Manipulation

Sometimes we can get horribly distressing intrusive images that just pop into our heads, and we have trouble getting rid of them again. The image may be based on a real memory, or just some random terrible image. These images can trigger strong physical sensations, and intense emotions of fear, dread, anger or sadness.

We can learn to manipulate the image so that we reduce the distressing feelings:

- ❖ Imagine putting the image on a TV screen. Now with an imaginary remote control, make the image smaller, making it more distant, perhaps turn it into black and white, remove the sound or give it a different soundtrack.
- ❖ Imagine a plate or sheet of strong clear plastic and put it between your face and the image. Push that image away from your face, until it gets smaller and is further away.

Turning around a 'bad' feeling

Sometimes we can get a 'bad' feeling in our body. It's possible to turn this feeling around by using our imagination. Ask yourself (example in italics):

- ❖ Where is this feeling in your body? *Belly*
- ❖ If this feeling had a shape, what would it be? *Oval shaped*
- ❖ How big would it be? *Rugby ball sized*
- ❖ And what colour would it be? *Dark blue*
- ❖ What texture or consistency would it be? *Solid mass*



And now:

- ❖ For this feeling to be better, what shape does it need to be? *Round*
- ❖ How big? *Getting smaller*
- ❖ And what colour would it be? *Yellow*
- ❖ What texture or consistency would it be? *Warm, light, translucent*



Positive Imagery for Depression

- ❖ When we feel depressed, we get caught up in cycle of negative thinking and imagery, doing less, and consequently feeling more depressed. Whilst it can be difficult to change our negative thinking, people often find it easier to see themselves in their mind's eye, enjoying the activities they used to enjoy doing.
- ❖ Doing this 2 or 3 times a day can be helpful in lifting our mood, and help us start to change our negative focus. The activity we visualise need not be



something we're planning to do in the future, the aim is simply to reactivate more helpful thinking and imagery.

- ❖ As with all other imagery exercises, it is helpful to strengthen the image by thinking about each of our senses, noticing even small details in what we can see and hear etc. It is also often helpful to use the other exercises described above.

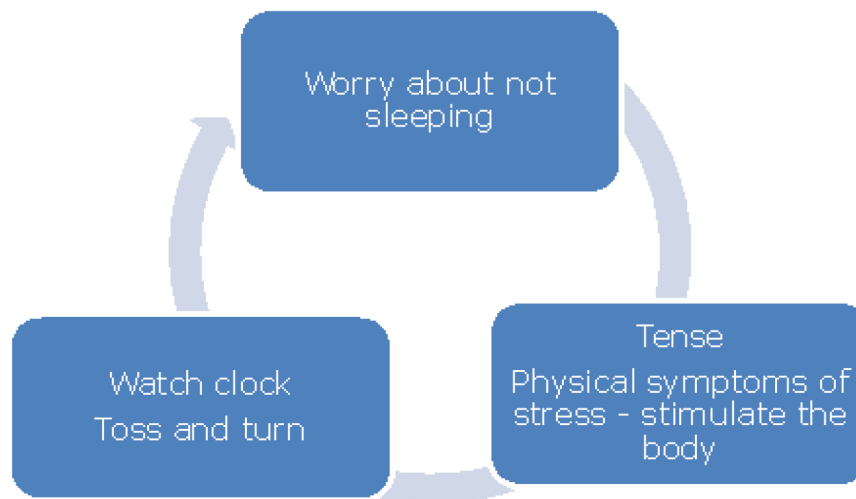
Sleep

There are many reasons for not sleeping well which may include distress, physical discomfort or physical illness.



Sleep needs vary. A baby starts life needing 16 hours or so of sleep each day, and the time we need for sleep decreases as we get older, so that adults, and particularly older adults may only need 4-6 hours a night. People's needs vary, but most people feel they need 7-8 hours, whilst others feel they need 9-10 hours a night.

We might have difficulty getting off to sleep, wake up frequently during the night, or wake early in the morning and not be able to get back to sleep. These all result in our feeling that we haven't slept enough - we feel tired, tense and are likely to worry about not sleeping. This worry can then make it even harder for us to sleep well.



If you have trouble sleeping, there are some things you can do to help yourself get a good night's rest. These include making changes in:

- Our environment
- Our behaviour
- Our thinking

Change our Environment

Are there any helpful changes you can make?

- Bedroom too light (or dark)
- Bedroom too hot or too cold
- Bedroom too noisy
- Bed too uncomfortable



- Partner keeping you awake? (snoring, restless etc)

Change our Behaviour

- Use your choice of [relaxation technique](#) before going to bed (whatever works for you)
- Don't go without sleep for a long time – keep to a regular pattern of going to bed and getting up at the same time every day, whether you are tired or not
- Keep bed for sleep and sex. Don't use it for watching television, using computer etc.
- Get some regular exercise during the day. Try some regular swimming or walking. Avoid exercise late in the evening.
- Cut down on caffeine (tea, coffee, some soft drinks) in the evening. Try a milky drink instead.
- Don't drink a lot of alcohol. It may help you fall asleep, but you will almost certainly wake up during the night.
- Don't eat or drink a lot late at night. Try to have your evening meal early rather than late.
- If you've had a bad night, resist the temptation to sleep the next day – it will make it harder to get off to sleep the following night.
- Speak to your doctor about your medication and how that might be affecting your sleep.
- If something is troubling you and there is nothing you can do about it right away, try writing it down before going to bed and then tell yourself to deal with it tomorrow.
- If you can't sleep, don't lie there worrying about it. Get up and do something you find relaxing like reading or [listening to quiet music](#). After a while you should feel tired enough to go to bed again.
- Keep a sleep diary for a week
When complete, you can look back and notice what helps you sleep better and what doesn't, so you can make positive changes and do more of what helps, and less of what doesn't. If nothing seemed to help, try something different.
- Avoid clock watching when in bed - put your attention somewhere restful, use [imagery](#) [mindful breathing](#) or your [relaxation technique](#)



Change our Thinking

- Worrying about not sleeping will keep you awake! Rather than put your focus of attention on the worrying thoughts, notice that they are just thoughts, then put your attention somewhere restful, use [imagery](#), [mindful breathing](#), or your [relaxation technique](#).

- Tell yourself that worrying about it will not help, and that you probably are getting enough, just less than you think you need. Our needs change as we get older.
- If you're worrying about a particular problem, write it down, and tell yourself you can sort it in the morning.

What now?

Practice, Practice, Practice!

This is just the start of your journey. You have learned some skills, and now you need to keep doing them, repeatedly.



CBT is not a magic-wand therapy, it takes hard work and commitment, but you will be rewarded!

After a while, you won't need to write things down most of the time as you'll find yourself doing all the steps in your head, you'll get better at it, and be able to do it quickly.



If you start learning to play a musical instrument, there's no point in just going along to your lessons each week - you **HAVE** to practise repeatedly every day, in order to progress and improve. You can be taught how to play, but you won't play any better without putting the practice in. For the serious musician who puts in the practice, eventually, they learn to play pieces of music competently. Some will go on to master their instrument.

We too can become competent at making effective and healthy changes, that make a real difference to our lives and the lives of those around us.

Most of what we've looked at and practised is covered in the [STOPP handout](#). Photocopy it, or print another copy from the website at www.get.gg, put it on your fridge, or next to your computer, in your car, or in your pocket.

Remind yourself often to **PRACTISE!** Practise at times you don't need to practise, so that when you really need those skills, they'll come easier to you. Just like that practising musician expects to play for several hours a day to become competent before showing off her skills at a big recital concert, or before the big exam.



Maintaining Progress

- Consider the future - what future situations might be difficult for you? What can you do differently at those times?
- What have you learned that's been the most helpful?
- What hasn't helped?
- What has helped?
- What is worth continuing to practise?
- What can you do to help or remind you to practise?
- What support or help do you need?



PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Remember and practise the helpful steps you have learned over and over, and even when you feel you can use them effectively, just carry on practising!

After a while, maybe after a great deal of practice, you will more easily notice your thoughts and reactions, realise what you are reacting to, and the meaning you are giving to situations. You will naturally start to question things, and then see things differently, seeing the bigger picture. In questioning and seeing different perspectives, so you will feel very differently, and much more healthily, from the way you used to react.



Use your "Maintaining Progress" (Relapse Prevention) worksheet to remind yourself of what helps most, and what you need to keep practising.



Practise STOPP! as much and as often as you can – the more you practise, the easier it will be when you need it

- ❖ **Stop!** Don't act immediately.
- ❖ **Take a breath**
- ❖ **Observe** – what's happening, what am I responding to?
- ❖ **Pull Back & Put in some Perspective** Fact or opinion? What's the bigger picture? What would someone else make of this? Is there another way of looking at it? What would I say to a friend?
- ❖ **Practise what works - Play to your Principles** – What will help most? What's the best thing to do, for me, for others, for this situation?

Practise Mindful Breathing and be aware of where you are putting your focus of attention

- ❖ **Mindfulness**

Continue to use your Treatment Plan to help you decide what else you need to do

- ❖ **MMT Treatment Plan**

Imagery Self-Help Techniques will help you build on the skills you have learned

❖ Imagery for Self-Help

Try not to act merely in the moment. Pull back from the situation. Take a wider view; compose yourself.

Epictetus (AD 55-135)



Positive Steps to Wellbeing

Be kind to yourself



Our culture, genes, religion, upbringing, education, gender, sexuality, beliefs, and life experiences make us who we are. We all have bad days.

Be kind to yourself. Encourage rather than criticise yourself. Treat yourself the way you would treat a friend in the same situation.

Exercise regularly



Being active helps lift our mood, reduces stress and anxiety, improves physical health, and gives us more energy.

Get outside, preferably in a green space or near water.

Find an activity you enjoy doing, and just do it.

Take up a hobby and/or learn a new skill

Increase your confidence and interest, meet others, or prepare for finding work.



Have some fun and/or be creative

Having fun or being creative helps us feel better and increases our confidence.

Enjoy yourself!



Help others



Get involved with a community project, charity work, or simply help out someone you know.

As well as benefiting others, you'll be doing something worthwhile which will help you feel better about yourself.

Relax



Make time for yourself. Allow yourself to chill out and relax. Find something that suits you – different things work for different people.

Breathe... (imagine a balloon in your belly, inflating and deflating as you breathe in and out)

Eat healthily

Eat regularly, eat breakfast, eat healthily, eat fruit and vegetables, drink water.



Balance sleep

Get into a healthy sleep routine – including going to bed and getting up at the same time each day.



Connect with others



Stay in touch with family and friends - make regular and frequent contact with them.

Beware drink and drugs



Avoid using alcohol (or non-prescribed drugs) to help you cope – it will only add to your problems.

See the bigger picture

We all give different meanings to situations and see things from our point of view. Broaden out your perspective and consider the bigger picture ('the helicopter view')



What meaning am I giving this? Is this fact or opinion? How would others see it? Is there another way of looking at this? How important is it, or will it be in a year's time? What can I do right now that will help most?

Accepting: 'It is as it is'

We tend to fight against distressing thoughts and feelings, but we can learn to just notice them and give up that struggle.



Some situations we just can't change. We can surf those waves rather than try to stop them.

Allow those thoughts and sensations just to be – they will pass.

If you need help with Step Seven or any Step of the course, please see this page for individual and personal support from the author, an accredited CBT Therapist:

If printing out the whole self-help course, you can dispose of the cover page of Step Seven (page 54)