

abc18. Guided Imagery Drill

By Dr. Victor Jean Ouellette

November 6, 2017

Guided Imagery

Guided imagery is a tool used by counsellors to help de-stress a person, to help desensitize a phobia, or to help break vicious cycle thinking in a person.

The counsellor would suggest a nice image for the client to bring to their mind and then the counsellor would talk them through whatever drill with this image the counsellor has been planning. This is the guiding phase where the name comes from.

The image should be something the client finds soothing and relaxing. It can be a peak experience the client has had in the past. A peak experience is an exceptional experience where the client goes into a type of altered state of consciousness, a state of bliss, a state of euphoria. That state might last only a few seconds, but it will be associated with some striking event experienced by the client. That event could be used as an image for the client. Alternatively, it's possible to use simply a backyard image where the client is relaxing comfortably.

Peak experiences are quite infrequent and do not last long. I have had two in my life. One was while skiing on a hill called Heavenly Valley in Lake Tahoe, California, with deep powder that I could not handle in those days. I was quite frustrated as the powder was deep and heavy. So, I took the advice of an instructor and followed a groomer down the hill and performed a drill the instructor gave me. That took me into a state of bliss that lasted maybe 30 seconds when I realized that I could do this steep hill.

Another time some years later occurred in a nighttime sailboat race from Niagara on the Lake back to Hamilton at 3 a.m. on a Viking 28 sailboat called Valhalla II. On one of my shifts when the moon was full and bright and a sailboat behind us was passing through the reflected moon glow on the water an event happened in my mind. That sight froze me as I stared at that boat trying to get upwind of us and into what we call clean air. It took that boat, at that time called the 101, about 30 seconds to travel through the moon glow and back into darkness. But, those 30 seconds broke me right out of my working shift and into a meditative state as I stared and stared transfixed on that view. So you see, I remember these peak experiences in quite good detail after all these years. Such is the nature of peak experiences.

The point in selecting an image for guided imagery is to avoid images that might create stress or fear. So, water is often not a good image to use if the client has any water fear or cannot swim.

Using a self-help-guided image would go something like the following. The client themselves would guide their own image by following small steps closer and closer to relaxation, something like self hypnosis and a way. The goal of guided imagery though, is not self hypnosis although a client can give words of affirmation to themselves at some point down the road in a guided image drill.

Words of affirmation are preselected words providing positive feelings of goodness and, or empowerment.

Research has shown that people using self-help guided imagery can help them in performing physical psychomotor tasks. For instance, when I was a teenager I used to use images of myself doing magic tricks in order to perfect the magic trick and performance on stage. Later, in psychological studies, I learned the technical aspects of what I was doing intuitively on a daily basis as a teenager.

In the de-stress field a person can take the guided imagery into meditation and progress to deeper and deeper levels of meditation. The person could then experience the three phases of meditation as they became more and more adept at performing these drills.

It is most helpful to have someone experienced in this technique help you through the drill for the first few times.