

THE POWER OF VISUALIZATION IN REDUCING STRESS



Visualization is a technique that can be used to reduce stress. During visualization, an individual imagines a situation and tries to experience it as if it were real. Visualization techniques are a very common tool in the treatment and management of mental health disorders, such as anxiety or depression [\(1\)](#).

The power behind this technique lies within our ability to see things in our minds' eyes. Just like when you are reading a book and you can imagine what the characters look and sound like from the description on the page. [\(2\)](#) visualise what it would be like if we had better outcomes than those reality has set for us at present; when combined with other forms of psychotherapy these visualizations can help patients gain self-confidence by changing how they think about themselves on an emotional level.

Studies have demonstrated the efficacy of visualization techniques in reducing stress. Stress can lead to many related issues, including anxiety and depression; it can even affect physical health such as gaining weight [\(3\)](#).

You may find yourself struggling with visualizing until you've had more practice - but don't be discouraged! Some people take a little longer than others. We're all different! The important thing is to let go and use your imagination freely. This skill, like any other, takes practise but is worth it in the end.

Here are a few visualization techniques that have been used successfully in lowering or eliminating stress. These techniques can be used to cope with past and present events, as well as future events. It is important to choose a visualization that will promote relaxation, rather than one that might cause further stress or negative emotions.

Some people may think visualisation is a waste of time but the imagination is a great tool. Being able to jump into a world free from stress, is a great way to take time out from the daily grind and come back rejuvenated and better able to face the stresses of your life.

The following list is not exhaustive but gives a few good examples and is a great place to start your visualisation journey. Just open your mind. Let's start.

- **Create a mental image of a pleasant, comforting place from the past.**

Examples could include a room from your childhood home or memories from a vacation/holiday spot from your past. The key here is to find something relaxing and calming. This is because the whole idea of visualisation is to help reduce stress and anxiety over current issues which you are currently facing in life. This type of visualization also works for those who have recently gone through traumatic experiences such as losing a loved one or going through a divorce.

•Create a mental image of a beautiful place in nature.

Examples could include sitting in a forest glade surrounded by strong, tall trees. The trees could be in full foliage or maybe the stunning colours of fall/autumn. Another great visualisation is sitting on a desert island, imagining the fine, white sand between your toes and the golden sun warming your back, the gentle breeze coming off the sea on your face. As you imagine this scene, hear the waves gently lapping at the seashore and imagine the beautiful coral and fish swimming in the ocean. Nature is spectacular and looking at images of clouds or the northern lights, for example, can take you to anywhere you like. You are only limited by your imagination. As you 'feel' yourself in these places the stress will simply fall away – if only for a few minutes [\(4\)](#).

•Creating a mental image of something that gives the individual strength in real-life situations.

A few examples may be linking arms with someone they trust or imagining wearing their favourite piece of clothing. These visualizations are meant for those who find struggles in certain areas of their lives. It can help inspire an individual when they need it most. For example, if somebody is struggling with social anxiety this type of visualization might be used to imagine themselves going up and talking to people without feeling afraid or anxious. And imagining having a friend by their side can enforce this image and their mental strength.

•Imagine yourself surrounded in light.

This works as the light makes the person feel protected. The light can either be like a force field around the person deflecting fears, stress and anxiety. This is really empowering when overcoming life's troubles. Alternatively, the person may envisage the light as coming from inside them. This is particularly good visualisation as the stressed person imagines themselves with an inner strength.

•Imagining a negative situation from the past, then changing it to a more positive outcome.

This visualization is particularly powerful at overcoming past memories that haunt us and cause stress. It is used in cognitive behaviour counselling but you can do it yourself just as easily [\(5\)](#) It can be something as simple as an argument that caused stress or even for more traumatic events such as abuse, harassment or bullying, etc. It allows the individual to see a different ending to a situation that has had a negative impact on their life causing them stress. The key here is that the event has actually occurred and you are using your imagination to change how it plays out. This will give you coping mechanisms going forward in real life.

When you are stressed, trying to visualise a calm scene can be tricky. This, in turn, could make you feel irritated which won't help matters. For this reason, lots of apps have been developed [\(6\)](#) to give you help with your stress busting visualisations.

There are also lots of resources online, in particular, on You Tube. Using the app or video you can just listen to the words and allow your imagination to do the rest. You will be transported to that better place really quickly and can then start to destress much quicker too. Using these visualisations also gives you a never-ending source of ideas so a) you won't get bored and b) you can keep trying them until you find the ones that work best for you

Finally, a great place to try your visualisations is when you are in bed. That way you can truly relax as you let the visualisation wash over you. And if you fall asleep listening to the app or video, don't worry as the message will still go into your brain subliminally. So, you can destress without effort.

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