



LEAVES ON A STREAM



1. Sit in a comfortable position. If you feel comfortable close your eyes, or rest them gently on a fixed spot in the room.
2. Visualize yourself sitting beside a gently flowing stream with leaves floating along the surface of the water.
3. For the next few minutes, take each thought that enters your mind and place it on a leaf... let it float by. Do this with each thought – pleasurable, painful or neutral. Even if you have joyous or enthusiastic thoughts, place them on a leaf and let them float by.
4. If your thoughts momentarily stop, continue to watch the stream. Sooner or later your thoughts will start up again.
5. Allow the stream to flow at its own pace. Don't try to speed it up and rush your thoughts along. You're not trying to rush the leaves along or "get rid" of your thoughts. You are allowing them to come and go at their own pace.
6. If your mind says "This is dumb," "I'm bored," or "I'm not doing this right," place *those thoughts* on leaves too and let them pass.
7. If a leaf gets stuck, allow it to hang around until it's ready to float by. If the thought comes up again, watch it float by another time.
8. If a difficult or painful feeling arises, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, "I notice myself having a feeling of boredom... impatience... frustration..." Place those thoughts on leaves and allow them to float along.
9. From time to time, your thoughts may hook you and distract you from being fully present in this exercise. This is *normal*. As soon as you realize that you have become sidetracked, gently bring your attention back to the visualization exercise.

Exercise Notes

This visualization exercise is a type of cognitive defusion. Cognitive defusion is the process of learning to become disentangled from your thoughts. Cognitive defusion is a tool that takes practice to become skilled. Be patient and compassionate with yourself if you found you were struggling to remain fully present and mindful. This adjustment is natural. Begin to reframe any difficulties you may have encountered during this visualization exercise as opportunities for growth. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy exercise adapted from Harris (2009).