

Leaves on a Stream

mindfulness exercise

Overview

During the **leaves on a stream** exercise, you will visualize yourself resting near a stream. Whenever thoughts enter your mind, you will imagine placing them atop a leaf, and watching as they float away. Instead of seeing the world from “inside” your thoughts, you will take a step back and view them from afar. By doing so, you will gain perspective on your thoughts and feelings, reducing their power.

Getting Started

Find a quiet place, free of distractions.

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.

Close your eyes or let your gaze soften.

Begin taking slow, deep breaths.

Instructions

Visualize

Imagine you are resting by the side of a stream. This scene can look however you like. Use all your senses to imagine what the stream and its surroundings look like, the sound of the water and other ambiance, the physical sensations, and anything else that comes to mind.

Meditate

Your objective during this exercise is simply to focus on the stream. When distractions enter your mind, such as thoughts or feelings, take a moment to notice them without judgment. For example, if you are distracted by other obligations, notice, and acknowledge to yourself: “I am thinking about my to-do list.”

Manage Your Thoughts

After taking a moment to observe a thought or feeling, return your attention to the stream. Place your thought upon a leaf. You might imagine writing the thought on the leaf or attaching it in some other way. Place the leaf in the water and watch it float down the stream until it disappears.

Practice

Continue visualizing the stream, simply observing, and releasing any thoughts that enter your mind. There is nothing else you need to do. You may set a timer for 10-15 minutes to know when practice concludes.

Notes

- Treat all of your thoughts and feelings the same, whether comfortable, uncomfortable, or neutral. The goal is to become aware of your experience—not to change or improve it.
- With regular practice, the leaves on a stream exercise will become easier, and its positive effects more powerful.