

Leaves on a Stream

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A cognitive defusion and mindfulness exercise

This exercise helps you notice thoughts as passing mental events, not as absolute truths you must believe or follow. It can be practiced with your eyes closed, for 5-10 minutes.

Steps of the exercise

1. Get comfortable and, if you like, close your eyes. Breathe a few times, at your own natural pace.
2. Imagine you are sitting by the bank of a calm stream, with leaves floating on the surface of the water.
3. Each time a thought appears, place it, in your imagination, on a leaf and watch it float slowly away down the stream.
4. Don't try to rush the leaves, and don't try to stop the thoughts from appearing. Just place each thought on a leaf and let it float at its own pace.
5. If you notice you've "climbed onto" a leaf - meaning you've gotten lost in a thought, started thinking about the past, the future, or begun analyzing - gently notice that and return to the image of the stream.
6. Continue for a few minutes. There is no wrong way to do this - simply returning, every time the mind has wandered, is the exercise itself.

What did you notice?

How many thoughts came up? Was it easy or hard to let them go?

A recurring thought you tend to get 'hooked' by

Write it here, then imagine it on a leaf, floating.