

What is Imagery?

Imagery, sometimes called guided imagery, visualization, mental rehearsal, or self-hypnosis, refers to specific techniques often used by psychologists to help individuals visualize or mentally rehearse a desired event. It involves using all the senses to create an imagined experience that feels real. By using all your senses, you create a genuine experience of having the desired outcome.

How to Use Imagery - Step-by-Step Guide

The first time you try imagery it's helpful to have a skilled facilitator or practitioner walk you through the process. This is referred to as guided imagery. You can also use CDs or tapes, or record your own script to use as your guide. After you are comfortable with the technique, it's easy to practice these techniques on your own.

1. Sit in a comfortable place where you won't be interrupted.
2. Relax your body and take several long, slow breaths.
3. Close your eyes and create a vivid and convincing image. This image can be one you've previously experienced, or one you simply desire.
4. If you become distracted or find you are thinking about something else, simply acknowledge it and let it go.
5. Focus on your breathing if you lose the image.
6. Maintain a positive attitude.
7. Imagine the sights, sounds, tastes, feelings, and even smells of the experience.

8. Take note of as much detail of the scene as possible. What are you wearing, who is there, what are you hearing, how do you feel?
9. If your imagery session is not going the way you want it to, simply open your eyes and start over with your breathing.
10. Always end an imagery session with a positive image.

Imagery and Sports

Athletes have many opportunities to try the various imagery or self-hypnosis techniques. From injury recovery to improved sports performance, these techniques are showing promise as a standard part of an athlete's training program.

Imagery for Pain Reduction

The idea behind using imagery for pain reduction is built upon the principle of relaxation. When muscles are relaxed, they hold less tension. This often leads to reductions in the experience of pain. Imagery techniques that often help increase relaxation and reduce pain include imagining the sensation of getting a massage, sitting on a warm beach or taking a hot bath. Some people have success with imagery by imagining pain being released from the body in a visual way, such as being breathed out with each exhalation. If you mentally rehearse experiences such as this in detail, you are using imagery.

Imagery for Healing

Just as people use imagery for reducing pain, individuals have reported that similar techniques work for promoting healing and recovery. Examples of healing imagery include imaging a broken bone being glued back together or torn muscles woven back together. Some people use warm, healing colors to promote a feeling of warmth over a body part. Even silly images of strength and power found in comic books have been used successfully to aid healing.