

Transcript: A Positive Memory in Nature

Health Care Provider:

This is a guided imagery exercise focused on a positive past experience in nature. Let's take a minute and identify a positive memory from your past which occurred in a natural environment. Can you think of any enjoyable moments from your life that took place in nature? These could be childhood experiences, adolescent or young adult experiences, or recent experiences. They can be from exciting trips, nearby parks, or right where you live. It could involve a beach, forest, lake, stream, river, field, mountain, park, or other natural space. See if you can identify a positive memory.

The hope is that this exercise will promote a sense of relaxation, peace, and contentment. Even if the reduction in stress is not significant by the end of the exercise, just taking a few minutes to allow your body to rest and to breathe more deeply can be good. Your mind may wander during the exercise, and that wandering is not a problem. In fact, noticing the wandering is a helpful skill we can practice now and apply throughout the day. So, when you notice your mind wandering, gently lead it back to the exercise.

The exercise can be carried out while sitting up or lying down – just recognize that if you are lying down, you may begin to feel tired and start dozing off. If you want to sleep, then that is great. If, however, you want to be attentive throughout the whole exercise, then sitting up may be ideal. So, if lying on your back, have your arms rest along the sides of your body, but not touching the rest of your body. If sitting, see if you can have your feet flat on the ground, your back straight, but not rigid, firm, but flexible. See if you can have your head resting on top of your shoulders, looking straight ahead. Try and find a comfortable position, and then settle in for the exercise.

Now, for this and other exercises, many individuals find it helpful to close their eyes. If you feel comfortable closing your eyes, please do so. Otherwise, find a spot on the ground in front of you or a plain wall, and relax your gaze. Relax the muscles around your eyes and rest your gaze on that spot.

Begin by taking some breaths, lower and slower than you would normally. Rather than having a lot of expansion in the chest and shoulders, you should notice your abdomen rising and falling as your lungs fill with air. With each in-breath your abdomen expands, and with each out-breath your abdomen contracts. Take a few more of these deep breaths. Now continue breathing into your belly, but allow your breath to return to a normal pace.

At this time, I would like you to begin to open up to your memory of the past experience in nature. Consider how old you were and what you were most interested in about this environment. In your mind, see if you can picture what the environment looked like. Was it a beach, forest, mountain, field, or other environment? What was right around you within arm's reach or at your feet? Can you remember or imagine what the ground looked like? What do you

notice right in your nearby environment? Is it morning, midday, evening, or night? Looking out further, what can you see? Are there features of the environment that are interesting to look at? Is there motion? What colors do you see? What does the sky look like?

What can you feel physically? Do you notice the breeze on your face? The warmth of the sun? How would you describe the temperature of this environment? See if you can remember what physical sensations you might have been feeling.

What can you smell? Are there salty ocean breezes, or the smell of the earth, trees, grasses, flowers? Explore the smells in this memory.

Can you taste anything? Were there foods or drinks that you brought with you?

What can you hear? Can you hear the sounds of animals, insects, birds? Can you hear water or wind, trees or plants blowing? Are you with anyone? Can you hear them or others in the area? Are the noises loud, quiet, or somewhere in-between? Take a minute to notice all the sounds you can remember in this nature experience.

With all of these sensations and experiences, can you take a few moments and just rest in this natural environment? Continue breathing, breathing in the air of that place, allowing any positive feelings such as joy, contentment, peace, happiness to come and go as they may. Rest in this place.

As you continue to rest, recognize that this is a place to which you can return. By nature, most of us spend much of our waking hours remembering difficult events from the past or imagining possible challenges in our future. This exercise reminds us to balance that tendency with imagery focused on positive memories. So, as you go throughout your week, know that you can return to this place or another place through an imagery exercise.

So, begin to say goodbye to this memory of nature, the sights, sounds, smells. Let them go and start to imagine what the room looked like before you closed your eyes. Begin moving your fingers and toes. And when you're ready, slowly blink and open your eyes, coming back to the room. As you feel like it, stretch out your muscles, and get ready for the rest of your day.