

The Zen Way 明

A Guide to Alternative Philosophy and Healing

Picture this: Healthier, Happier and Smarter Kids

Using Guided Imagery with Children & Adolescents

By Nancy Gordon, LCSW

Guided imagery is the use of the imagination or mental pictures to create positive change. It is a powerful mind-body approach that works very well with children. Imagery is a safe, fun, and easy technique that gives kids a sense of personal power and control.

Years of research show that imagery has a remarkable effect on both mind and body. Imagery is the language that the body understands. For example, imagining a peaceful scene slows down breathing and heart rate, making the body calmer.

Imagery can help kids reduce stress, anxiety, and depression; change bad habits such as overeating; overcome sleep problems and bedwetting; cope with chronic illness; decrease pain; prepare for medical procedures; improve learning, creativity, and athletic performance; enhance confidence and self-esteem.

Imagery is best done in a state of relaxed attention. A child should be instructed to close his/her eyes and begin deep breathing. You can tell children to visualize a soothing color filling their bodies or to imagine they are rag dolls; this relaxes the muscles. To deepen relaxation, ask the child to imagine being in a safe, peaceful place. This calming exercise can work within seconds and with practice, a kid can do it on the spot when faced with a stressful situation. Guided imagery has been called the

“internal magic wand”, it can be taken anywhere and used in any situation with no special equipment needed – just the imagination.

Learning & Performance Enhancement

Stress, anxiety, and fear shut down the creative side of the brain. Kids learn more and perform better when they are relaxed and confident. The calming exercises above, combined with “mental rehearsal”, can facilitate performance, whether academic, athletic, or artistic. Once relaxed, a child is guided to imagine taking the steps needed to achieve success in a particular area. Many studies show that physical practice plus visualization may be the best method of skill training. Mental rehearsal is also a great way to teach social skills.

Visualization while reading is a proven strategy for improving reading comprehension. Asking a child to share what he “sees” when reading will help facts and ideas take root in the reader’s mind. Another exercise is to have a kid form a mental picture of his very own brain: if it’s the size of a pea, (as one child I worked with described) they can make it grow; if it’s messy, they can clean it up.

Improving Health

Guided imagery is an inexpensive complement to traditional medical care for everything from stomachaches to life threatening disease. Conditions caused by or aggravated by stress often respond well to imagery suggestions (e.g., gastrointestinal disorders). Emotional distress related to illness may also wors-

en symptoms. In these situations, using imagery to enhance mood can have a positive effect on physical healing.

Charlotte Reznick, PhD., well-known for her work with imagery and children, uses the image of a healing pool where kids drink magical waters. For kids in pain, “glove anesthesia” can be helpful. A child is guided to imagine numbing a hand in an ice-filled bucket and then placing the hand on the painful body part to transfer the numbness. Mental rehearsal may also be used to help prepare children for medical and surgical procedures. Evidence provides that envisioning a positive outcome can speed up recovery.

Another strategy for coping with illness is “inner guide/inner ally” imagery. In this technique, kids picture a loving and wise person, animal, or entity that can provide comfort, support, and advice during scary times. In Larry Dossey’s book, *Meaning and Medicine*, he cites the case of Michael, a 14 year old boy with leukemia. During chemo, Michael would transform himself into a computer and assume its qualities, including reliability. In this state, he imagined his body was an immensely intelligent program dispatching the drugs to the cancer cells with perfect effectiveness. Michael said, “I know everything is going to come out okay because my computer is smarter than I am and can think faster too. Besides, it’s fun.”

Kids can easily learn how to use their imaginations for positive change. Guided imagery can be done at home, school, or in a session with a

trained clinician and many children enjoy listening to guided imagery audiotapes. (For availability, check online at: www.healthjourneys.com.) There are endless ways in which guided imagery can be used to help children succeed academically, thrive socially, and achieve maximum health.

Nancy Gordon, LCSW, is certified in Interactive Guided Imagery (IGI) through the Academy for Guided Imagery (www.academyforguidedimagery.com). She is a school social worker and a psychotherapist in private practice working with children, adolescents, and adults. She can be reached at 312-214-0679 or ngrdn@hotmail.com.

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How do you breathe?

By Christine Jeffers

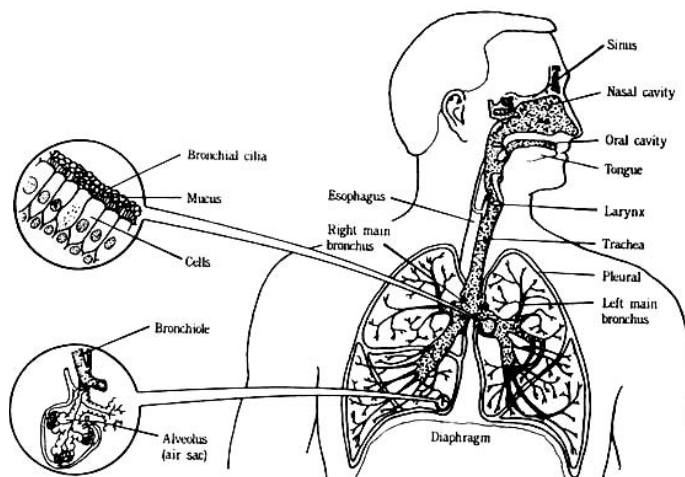
How you breathe can have a great affect on your health. Breathing can send your body into a state of relaxation, or activate your sympathetic nervous system – your body’s fight or flight response. Breathing allows the “life force” (chi, qi, prana) to enter your body and fill your blood with life giving oxygen. Different types of breathing can also help support the back, massage the viscera, cool the body, reduce tension and clear the mind. The practice of good breathing techniques helps keep the body and mind running at optimum levels. However, most of us are breathing in a way that keeps our body in a state of anxiety.

Clavicular breathing or breathing from the chest, promotes anxiety. In clavicular breathing, the collarbone and shoulders rise up allowing only the upper part of the lungs to receive fresh air. This type of breathing, also known as, “shallow breathing”, is the least efficient. It keeps the body’s sympathetic nervous system activated, which puts the body in a constant state of anxiety.

Abdominal or Diaphragmatic breathing is more efficient by allowing a better oxygen exchange. Abdominal breathing allows the body to enter a state of relaxation by activating the body’s parasympathetic nervous system. This system slows the heart rate and breathing rate and also helps support the digestive system. The lowering of the diaphragm, massages organs helping them to function correctly. When the diaphragm is relaxed after exhalation, a state of absolute relaxation can be achieved by holding the breath a few seconds with the lungs empty.

Thoracic or Costal breathing involves expanding the thorax; breathing by expanding the rib cage out the back and laterally, or to the sides. The deep abdominal muscles, (transverse abdominus), remain activated and the belly should not rise and fall. Keeping the transverse abdominus activated helps to support the spine. Breathing in this manner is preferred when performing exercises such as Pilates or resistance training.

Alternative forms of breathing are also used in Yoga and Qigong. “Alternate Nostril Breathing”, inhaling through one nostril and exhaling through the other, is used in Yoga to balance the body’s natural rhythm and tone up the entire nervous system. A cleansing breath called, “Kapalbhathi”, which cleans the capillaries of the remotest part of your body



Structure of the respiratory system

and “Sheetali”, a cooling breath, which is good for the liver and spleen and helps purify the blood, are also used. Qigong employs different types of breathing to manipulate the Qi to various parts of the body to strengthen organs. Abdominal breathing is used to lower blood pressure, activate peristalsis, and increase oxygen intake. Active upper body breathing stimulates the heart and lungs to move qi more quickly and with greater force. Focused lower belly breathing strengthens the kidneys, which activate the yang element in the spleen and lungs thus activating the digestive and respiratory systems.

To find out how you are breathing, lie on the floor or bed and place one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly. Inhale and exhale 3 times and feel which part of your body is rising and falling. If it is your chest, then you are a clavicular breather. If your belly rises and falls, you are abdominally breathing. If neither are rising and falling and you feel your back and sides of your ribs expanding into the floor or bed, then you are a thoracic breather.

Christine Jeffers is an ACE & NASM certified personal trainer and a licensed massage therapist specializing in Shiatsu. Chris conducts private sessions, offers online training programs and conducts corporate fitness seminars on east and west philosophies. She can be contacted online at: www.christinejeffers.com or by phone at: 847-322-8687.

The Zen Way

“Zen” is a state of relax and calm which promotes seeing deeply into the value of things. “The Way” refers to the manner in which things exist: the cycles of the world, the relationship between fire, earth, metal, water and wood; when yin becomes yang – it is a Tao philosophy.

This section is dedicated to providing an informative look at alternative ideas, philosophy and healings in a learning and easy to comprehend manner.

-CWM