

## VISUALIZING A SAFE PLACE

Visualization is a coping strategy that can enable you to take a very helpful "break" from episodes of stress, anxiety, or reacting to past trauma. It involves imagining yourself in a peaceful and safe environment, a place that makes you feel relaxed, happy, and secure. By going to a safe place in your imagination, you can calm your mind and body and distract yourself with a pleasant experience of your own creation. Visualization will work best if you practice it daily, until it becomes second nature. Then you will be able to use it whenever you need to.

### **How to Use Visualization**

- **Go to a quiet, relaxing environment to engage in visualization**, where there is a minimum of distractions and a comfortable place to sit down (or to lie down). Do your best to make yourself feel "at home" wherever you are—even if you must try to relax in a place that is not ideal or when you feel a stressful episode "coming on."
- **Think of a place, real or imagined, that is guaranteed to be a safe place for you**, someplace relaxing and attractive for all of your senses. It is important to get a very clear and complete picture of this place in your mind. It should be a place you will want to return to again and again. Take your time imagining what you are experiencing in this special place with each of your senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell).
- **Notice your body and relax.** Concentrate on any places in your body where your muscles feel tight, and one by one in each of those places, consciously let go of the tightness. Imagine your body as being soft, pliable, and at ease. Don't worry if you don't feel completely relaxed, and tell yourself that it is helping you even if you can just think about what it would be like to feel calm and relaxed throughout your body.
- **Immerse yourself in imagining being in your safe place.** You may do this with your eyes open or closed: In your mind's eye, picture very clearly where you are. See all that is around you. Hear the sounds. Smell the smells. Taste the tastes. Touch things in your safe place and feel them touching you. Get a sense of everything about this place that relaxes you and makes you feel safe. Imagine every detail.
- **Stay in your safe place for 5 or 10 minutes or longer** (for as long as you'd like to). Breathe normally, and feel your breath coming in and going out, keeping your mental focus on the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and sensations in your safe place. Whenever your mind wanders off to other thoughts or you feel any anxiety or stress coming up, go immediately back to the images and sensations of your safe place.
- **End the visualization exercise slowly.** Open your eyes and look around. Continue to feel yourself breathing in and out. Congratulate yourself for going to your safe place. Sit still for a moment or two before you go on to other activities.

*Practice this every day. Whenever you feel yourself starting to become distressed—or even when you're in the midst of a stressful episode or immediately after a difficult experience—intentionally visualize your safe place, even if only for a few minutes.*

