WORKSHEET 18 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

Leaves on a stream

Letting thoughts pass without following them (defusion)

AIM

Train the ability to observe thoughts coming and going, without holding on to them or pushing them away, by placing them on leaves floating downstream.

WHO IT IS FOR

Rumination, repetitive worries, intrusive thoughts. After worksheet 01.

DURATION

5-10 min in session; 5 min a day

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Guide the image: sitting on the bank of a stream, leaves are floating past on the water.
2. Each thought that appears (words, images, memories) is placed on a leaf and allowed to go at the pace of the current.
3. If the person notices they have "followed" a thought, they notice it and come back to the bank.
4. After 5 minutes, explore: what was easy, what was difficult? Which thoughts "stuck"?
5. Emphasise that getting carried away and coming back is part of the exercise.

POINTS TO WATCH

> The aim is not for thoughts to go away faster (that becomes a struggle again). If the image doesn't work, offer a variant: clouds in the sky, carriages of a train, subtitles in a film.

REFERENCES

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D. & Wilson, K. G. (2012). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change (2nd ed.). Guilford.

Harris, R. (2019). ACT Made Simple: An Easy-to-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (2nd ed.). New Harbinger.

PSYCHOLOGIST'S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 18 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

Leaves on a stream

Imagine you are sitting on the bank of a stream. Leaves are floating past on the water. Your thoughts can travel on those leaves, without you having to follow them or push them along.

1. Close your eyes or fix your gaze on a point. Imagine the stream and the leaves.
2. Each thought that comes (words, images, memories): put it on a leaf and watch it float by.
3. If you got carried away, just notice it and come back to the bank.
4. Carry on for 5 minutes. Pleasant thoughts go on the leaves too.

Day	Thoughts that “stuck”	Ease of letting them pass /10

What do I notice when I watch my thoughts go by instead of following them?

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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