

# Teaching Acceptance Strategies through Visualization

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## THEORY

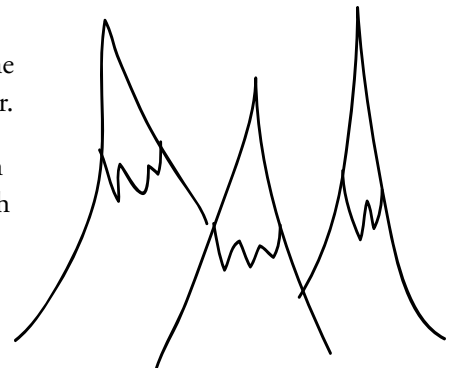
The Third Wave of psychotherapeutic orientation, in which acceptance strategies are the cornerstone, grew out of a difficulty in reaching some clients who lacked sufficient life skills and coping skills to deal with everyday life challenges. The *Third Wave* orientations include DBT, MBCT and ACT. **All *Third Wave* orientations rely heavily on CBT concepts softened with the Eastern approaches of acceptance and mindfulness.** Even CBT, which is considered the Second Wave of psychological orientations (The First Wave includes the psychoanalytic and classic behavioral approaches), has also expanded to include acceptance and mindfulness practice.

## IMPLEMENTATION

These TIPs offer some effective visualization strategies for teaching your group members acceptance and mindfulness practices. Acceptance practices help us make peace with reality and what cannot be changed. This orientation helps to decrease upsetting thoughts and rumination based on the past.

The following are some other powerful visualizations and demonstrations to teach acceptance strategies:

- **Quicksand Visualization** - Hayes uses the metaphor of being stuck in quicksand as being like a person who fights reality and ends up getting deeper and deeper in the quicksand. Only by acceptance of the quicksand by lying spread eagle-like - and not resisting- can we keep ourselves from sinking deeper.
- **Beach Ball Visualization**- If you put a beach ball in a tub of water and push it down it will keep popping back up. This demonstrates the impossibility of resisting reality and pushing thoughts away. If we persist in denying or fighting reality, it will keep coming back stronger, just as the beach ball in water will keep popping back up. As the saying goes, “what you resist will persist.”
- **Helicopter or Airplane Visualization** - To gain a more objective perspective, imagine you are in a helicopter or an airplane. From the air, you can get a larger perspective on the world, with a bit more objectivity and detachment.
- **A Mountain** - Regardless of the weather, rain, snow, sleet, hail and sunshine, the mountain still stands and is unwavering. It does not react to inclement weather.
- **A Train** - Imagine standing on a bridge and watching a train go by, with each boxcar having a negative thought, word or phrase written on it. As you watch it go by, you are detaching yourself from those thoughts.



- **Balloons Drifting** - Imagine balloons drifting away. Have your clients imagine holding a whole cluster of balloons, each written with a memory, thought or disturbing situation. Then suggest that they imagine themselves letting go and watching the balloons fly away and disappear.
- **Computer or Movie Screen Visualization** - Imagine watching your thoughts on a computer screen. You can imagine these thoughts going by as if they are stock market quotes on a ticker tape at the bottom of the financial channels.  
  
Just like the stocks, whether they go up or down, just watch them dispassionately and distance yourself from the panic. Think of a stock market analyst on TV. They are reporting dispassionately; they are not freaking out when the market plummets.
- **Teflon Mind** - Lane Pedersen uses the image of *Teflon mind* in describing how to let go of your thoughts instead of getting attached to them. With Teflon - things don't get stuck!

## PROCESSING

Ask group members how they felt using these visualizations. Suggest that they practice these visualizations and demonstrations at home. The success of the activities depends on the processing as a group. Ask your group members if they can share some of their own visualizations that have helped them become more mindful and accepting.

