

LEAVES ON A STREAM – PRACTICING COGNITIVE DEFUSION © Russ Harris

You may find throughout this exercise that your thoughts manage to hook you. This is normal. As soon as you realize it, start the exercise again from the beginning.

1. Find a comfortable position, and either close your eyes or fix your eyes on a spot, whichever you prefer.
2. Imagine you're sitting by the side of a gently flowing stream, and there are leaves flowing past on the surface of the stream. Imagine it however you like—it's your imagination. (*Pause 10 seconds.*)
3. Now, for the next few minutes, take every thought that pops into your head, place it on a leaf, and let it float on by. Do this regardless of whether the thoughts are positive or negative, pleasurable or painful. Even if they're the most wonderful thoughts, place them on the leaf and let them float on by. (*Pause 10 seconds.*)
4. If your thoughts stop, just watch the stream. Sooner or later your thoughts will start up again. (*Pause 20 seconds.*)
5. Allow the stream to flow at its own rate. Don't speed it up. You're not trying to wash the leaves away—you're allowing them to come and go in their own good time. (*Pause 20 seconds.*)
6. If your mind says, *This is stupid* or *I can't do it*, place those thoughts on a leaf. (*Pause 20 seconds.*)
7. If a leaf gets stuck, let it hang around. Don't force it to float away. (*Pause 20 seconds.*)
8. If a difficult feeling arises, such as boredom or impatience, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, "Here's a feeling of boredom" or "Here's a feeling of impatience." Then place those words on a leaf, and let the leaf float on by.
9. From time to time, your thoughts will hook you, and you'll lose track of the exercise. This is normal and natural, and it will keep happening. As soon as you realize it's happened, gently acknowledge it and then start the exercise again.