

Visualization

by Dr. Amanda Wintink, PhD



Visualization is a powerful technique that helps us to concentrate while focusing our brain on the most important object at any given time. Our brain processes an enormous amount of information, much more than we can be aware of at a conscious level. As a result, our brain relies on our input to tell it what information is important and where to focus.

For example, if we mostly focus on negative things (e.g., bad smells, messy house) then the negativity dominates the space in our brain and doesn't leave much room for positive thoughts, actions, or emotions. Actively engaging in positive thinking tells our brain that this is an important focus point and to make room for it. Visualization is a practice that facilitates the exchange of negative for positive thoughts.

Visualization is a difficult practice for the average person, never mind someone with ADHD, but having someone else guide the visualization makes it a lot easier to practice. As a parent, you have an excellent opportunity to feed your child's brain with positive thoughts! These thoughts eventually turn into real actions.

Prep:

With your child, come up with a recent situation in which their behavior was disruptive, impulsive or otherwise considered negative. It is important that both you and your child agree on the incident. Then, discuss this incident and decide how it could have had a better outcome. When discussing, ensure that you are simply remembering the incident rather than reliving it or re-punishing for it. Caution: If there are still negative emotions lingering, it is probably not appropriate for this exercise.

Initial Focus:

Have your child sit upright so they are comfortable with closed eyes. Begin with mental focus by guiding your child to focus on themselves. This will help settle the mind. Ask your child to focus on inhaling for a count of 4 seconds, pausing for 1 second before exhaling, then exhaling for 6 seconds, pausing again before inhaling, and then repeating the same cycle. Let your child continue for 10 breaths, while you watch their chest and belly moving with each breath. The belly/chest should rise with the inhale and fall back down with the exhale.

Priming for Positive:

Ask your child to remember a time when he/she felt proud of something they did, said, or accomplished. The focus should be on the behavior they DID and were proud of it. Ask your child to say it aloud to ensure that they are following the task properly! Let your child enjoy this memory for a minute but not too long, that they lose focus.

Visualization:

Now focus on the recent incident you both agreed upon, the incident with the undesirable outcome. Ask him/her to remember all the details of the incident. Then, ask your child to visualize the appropriate action. Ask them to imagine it like it's a movie or like a choose-your-own adventure book where he/she is in complete control of his/her actions and outcomes. Invite your child to fully engage in this visualization by invoking different sensations. Ask guiding questions like "what does it look like, smell like, and sound like" in the memory. Your child may find it easier to speak it aloud at first and then eventually he/she may engage with it fully in his or her own mind.

Booster Shot:

End with some verbal self-esteem boosters! Tell your child to feel proud of the positive outcome. Tell your child to feel happy about the new outcome. Tell your child this is formed in his memory and will be there next time to help them out.

Eventually, your child will start to "own" these alternate outcomes and store them in his/her brain. This makes them more readily available the next time a similar event starts to happen. You can continue to explore visualization with a variety of scenarios. This offers a positive approach to behavior modification where your child can claim control over his/her new-and-improved behavior!