

Supporting children's emotional wellbeing using visualisations

Visualisations have been likened to 'journeys of the imagination' where past, future or imaginary events can be recalled or created.

Visualisation is a teaching strategy that can be used to:

- explore fears or anxieties in a non- threatening way
- create a vision of what we want to achieve to help commit ourselves more fully to goals
- prepare for stressful or challenging situations by imagining our success in advance
- increase self-awareness and maintain self-esteem by visualising past successes
- open or close a session by creating a sense of calm and relaxation.

Visualisations need to take place in a relaxed, interruption-free environment, which is not always easy to achieve in classrooms. For guided visualisations, the teacher needs to be familiar with the script and deliver it in a clear, calm voice. When closing a visualisation exercise, give the children time to gently 'come back' to the present. Sometimes it's helpful to count from five to one to signal the end of the visualisation, and to allow children to make eye contact with other children before moving on.

Tips for using visualisations with children:

1. Invite the child to find somewhere comfortable and quiet where they can concentrate and relax, or to find a comfortable seated position in their chair.
2. Encourage them to take long, slow breaths, breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth to slow the heart rate and help to relax.
3. Invite the child to close their eyes so that they can use their imagination to create the visualisation in their mind. If they feel uncomfortable closing their eyes, ask them to gaze softly at their hands in their lap.
4. Encourage the child to make the image as detailed as possible. Tell them to think about sights, sounds, feelings, smells and tastes, to make sure all of the senses are aligned to the image and it's as real as possible. They need to think about what are they wearing, what can they hear, and how they feel.
5. If they get distracted, or the image doesn't go the way they want, they can open their eyes, take some deep breaths and restart the process. It may take some practise to develop the focus and skills that visualisation requires.
6. Ensure the visualisation ends on a positive image, to help boost confidence and self-belief, and to reduce any feelings of anxiety.

The following visualisations have been created by members of the PDST Primary Health and Wellbeing team, or have been extracted from the Walk Tall (SPHE) Programme, and are available as audio recordings on our website: www.pdst.ie/primary/healthwellbeing

