



# Creating Personal Wellness Goals

by GAIL CARROLL

**I**t is the beginning of another school year. Beginnings bring so many opportunities to make fresh starts, new habits, create dreams and model good practices in caring for ourselves and for our students.

The following are just a few of the questions that might come to mind when we are starting another school year:

- What will my class be like this year?
- What challenges will I face?
- How will I manage those challenges?
- How will I prepare myself to conquer stress?
- How will I keep myself well and prevent burnout?

I am looking forward to another year of sharing wellness thoughts, ideas and plans with all of you. For the past number of years I have been receiving requests to record my 5 minute Guided Imagery exercises. This summer I took the time to record three Guided Imagery exercises. They can be accessed through the NLTA website at [www.nlta.nl.ca/guided-imagery/](http://www.nlta.nl.ca/guided-imagery/).

When you are working on your personal growth/development plan this school year you might consider how some of the information in this article could add value to your own plans.

Guided Imagery is definitely a form of mindfulness! "Good Therapy", a respected online association of therapists, defines Guided Imagery as a technique which mental health professionals use to help individuals focus on mental images in order to evoke feelings of relaxation and is based on the concept of the mind-body connection ([www.goodtherapy.org](http://www.goodtherapy.org)). This is believed to contribute to an individuals' overall wellbeing. Guided Imagery makes use of all of your senses. For those of you who have not yet experienced Guided Imagery, here is a quick but effective demonstration:

- Close your eyes and take a nice deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Continue to focus on your breathing as you begin to feel your shoulders relax.
- Now picture a beautiful ripe orange.
- Smell the skin of the orange and feel its texture.
- Begin to peel the orange and as you do envision a huge squirt of fresh sweet juice squirts right at you.

Enjoy the smell, the feel and the taste of the juice.

- Now picture taking a huge bite of your orange. Feel the juice running and taste the sweetness of its juice. (If you salivate in reality you will have the reaction most people have which shows how effective Guided Imagery can be.)

Guided Imagery engages all of your senses: hearing, seeing, smell and touch. It reminds us to be mindful and to slow down. For this and many other reasons it has been researched to show effectiveness in aiding:

- Relaxation
- Healing
- Reducing stress
- Learning
- Creativity
- Attitude
- Pain management
- Lowering blood pressure
- Preparing for competition
- Reducing anxiety and exam anxiety

## Frequently Asked Questions

**• Is Guided Imagery safe?** Guided Imagery is safe. There are no known risks associated with it. Research suggests it is most effective when the person teaching it has training in Guided Imagery techniques. (It is always important to tell your doctor if you are using an alternative therapy or if you are thinking about combining an alternative therapy with your conventional medical treatment. It is important for safety to seek medical advice as alternate therapies may not be safe in some medical situations. It is advisable to never stop conventional medical therapy or treatment to rely only on an alternative therapy.)

**• Is Guided Imagery hypnosis or a form of hypnosis?** No, Guided Imagery is a practice in which you are in the driver's seat. You are in complete control. You can stop the practice at any time you choose. If it is a practice where you are being guided to picture images of your own choosing, then, you are in complete control and can choose any images you like.

**• What is the difference between Guided Imagery and hypnosis?** In Guided Imagery you are in com-

plete control. Hypnosis is different in that a licensed therapist is putting you into a tranquil altered state and the conscious control of the mind is inhibited while the subconscious mind is stirred. Hypnosis is often used as a form of behavior modification whereas Guided Imagery is used to assist in relaxation and for other health benefits. (Dr. Mickey Wilson, PhD)

• **Is Guided Imagery a form of meditation?** It is a form of meditation. It can clear your mind, help you relax and slow down. It is seen as a form of mindfulness.

• **How does Guided Imagery work?** When you are worried about something you begin to think about it more frequently and your thoughts carry your fears and worries; preparing your body for the fight, flight, freeze response that you learned about in high school biology. When you are feeling this kind of stress your breathing quickens, your muscles tighten, your heart rate speeds up and stress hormones get released into your body to create this anxious state. Guided Imagery uses slow, deep breathing and positive imagery to help disarm this stress response before it really takes off. This then enables you to feel more in control of your life, less stressed and more relaxed.

• **How long do the benefits of Guided Imagery last?** Research shows the benefits can last for a lifetime if you continue to practice the technique. Most people report feeling the relaxation benefits immediately. Even if you feel this may not work for you and your mind is too busy to take it in, most people will begin to feel the effects by the second or third session.

• **What do I need to do to prepare to participate in Guided Imagery and to make it as effective as possible for me?** All you have to do is put yourself in a comfortable spot, i.e., sitting comfortably in a chair in a quiet room or lying down on the floor or a bed. Remember not to cross your arms or legs; just let yourself be and as you begin the breathing exercises you will feel your body begin to relax. Some people like to cozy up with a favorite blanket or pillow or both. As long as you are in a comfortable position in a quiet space you can make it what you like. It does help to have low lighting and a comfortable temperature. Then just follow the voice of the therapist who is guiding you through the session.

• **Is this an individual or a group practice?** It can be practiced on a 1:1 basis or in a group.

• **When and how often should I use this?** You can use it any time and as often as you like. The recommendation is that ideally twice a day can bring wonderful benefits. Starting your day off with Guided Imagery and ending your day with it can carry wonderful health benefits.

• **Can kids do Guided Imagery?** Yes. And kids are

the best at it as their imaginations are so wonderful! It is also recommended to assist teenagers in coping with stress and anxiety as well as all of the changes teens go through with hormones and growth and development.

**W**ith all of the benefits listed above, this low cost therapy opens the doors to bringing the relaxation factor into your life so easily. So make a date with yourself and give this a try. The challenge I would like to leave each of you with at the beginning of this school year is to put yourselves first. Try Guided Imagery and include stress management and relaxation in your personal schedule and Professional Growth Plans. What are you waiting for? Go to [www.nlta.nl.ca/guided-imagery/](http://www.nlta.nl.ca/guided-imagery/) to get started!

Wishing you all a healthy and successful school year!

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