

Leaves on a Stream Script

Written for ACT therapists who want the exercise as it is actually delivered, not summarised. Seven minutes of defusion practice with every silence timed, including the part most versions leave out: what to say when the stream stops, a leaf sticks, or the client realises they have been away from the bank for a minute.

7 min · 6 segments

01. Setting up

1 min

[read this at an ordinary speaking pace — the slowing down comes later, and if you start slow you have nowhere to go]

Sit somewhere you can stay for about ten minutes. Feet on the floor, hands wherever they fall. You can close your eyes, or let them rest half open on a spot on the floor in front of you. Whichever takes less effort. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

This is not about clearing your mind or feeling calm. It is about watching thoughts arrive and letting them carry on past you. If it goes well you may notice more thoughts rather than fewer. That is the exercise doing what it does.

Take one breath that is a little longer on the way out than on the way in. Just one. Then let your breathing go back to whatever it was doing on its own. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

02. Finding the stream

1 min 30

[slow to about half your normal pace here, with a clear beat between sentences]

Picture a stream. It is moving gently from one side of you to the other. It could be a stream you have walked beside, or one you are making up now. Either works. *[pause for 20 seconds — give them time to build it]*

Notice what is on the surface. Leaves, carried by the water. They come from somewhere out of sight, they pass in front of you, and they go on out of sight the other way. You are on the bank. You are not in the water. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

If no stream comes, use whatever does come. A conveyor belt. Cars on a road below a bridge. Clouds. The picture matters less than the movement, and less than you standing to one side of it. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

03. Placing thoughts on leaves

1 min 30

[leave longer silences than feel comfortable — this is where the work happens, and your voice interrupts it]

Now wait for the next thought to arrive. Whatever it is. A word, a picture, a worry, a piece of a song. When it comes, put it on a leaf, and let the leaf carry it. *[pause for 30 seconds]*

If the thought comes as a picture, put the picture on the leaf. If it comes as words, put the words on the leaf. You do not need to change it, argue with it or finish it. Only set it down and watch it move. *[pause for 30 seconds]*

Let that one go by. Then wait for the next. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

04. When the stream stops

1 min 30

[warm and matter of fact — you are describing something ordinary, not correcting a mistake]

At some point the stream will stop. Or a leaf will stick. Or you will notice you have been somewhere else entirely, thinking rather than watching. This happens to everyone who does this, usually inside the first minute. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

The noticing is the moment worth having. See if you can find what was going on just before the water stopped. Usually there was a thought that mattered more than the others, and you climbed into it instead of putting it on a leaf. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

Put that one on a leaf now. If it will not sit still, put the thought about it not sitting still on a leaf as well. Then start the water moving again. You will do this several more times before we finish. That is not the exercise failing. That is the whole of it. *[pause for 25 seconds]*

05. Letting it run

1 min 15

[read the first line, then say nothing at all for the full silence — resist filling it]

Carry on by yourself now. Thought, leaf, water. When you drift, notice, and come back to the bank. *[silence for 45 seconds — do not speak, do not add guidance]*

Still on the bank. Still watching. *[silence for 20 seconds]*

06. Coming back

30 sec

[bring your voice back to ordinary volume and pace on the first sentence — that signals the end more clearly than any words]

Let the stream go. It will still be there when you want it.

Bring your attention to the room. The sound of it, the temperature of it, the chair holding you. Move your fingers. When you are ready, open your eyes. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

One thing to take with you. The thoughts you put on leaves have not gone anywhere. They will be back this afternoon. What you practised was noticing them arrive, and choosing not to climb in.

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