

Urge Surfing Script

Written for DBT therapists and addiction counsellors who need a script to read aloud with the urge live in the room. Eight minutes of locating the urge in the body, describing its actual shape, and staying on it through the peak and down the other side — with nothing in it that promises the urge will go, because a client who learns urge surfing as a way to make cravings stop has learned suppression with a nicer name.

8 min · 5 segments

01. Setting up the ride

1 min 15

[Read the second paragraph slowly and with no reassurance in your voice. If you sound like you are promising relief, the whole script turns into a technique for getting rid of urges, which is the one thing it is not.]

Sit however you can sit for the next few minutes. You do not have to be still and you do not have to be comfortable. If the urge is here right now, that is what we want. If it has faded, bring to mind the last time it was strong — where you were, what was in front of you, what time of day it was. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

We are not going to get rid of it. That is worth saying plainly at the start. We are going to sit next to it and watch what it actually does, from the beginning through to the end. You have probably never watched one all the way through, because usually something happens before the end — you act on it, or you fight it, or you find something to do instead. Today we just watch. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

Let your eyes close, or rest them on a point on the floor. Take one breath that is a little longer on the way out than on the way in. Then let your breathing go back to doing whatever it wants to do. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

02. Where it lives

1 min 45

[Clients usually answer with an emotion or a reason here rather than a sensation. If that happens, ask where in the body that sits, then pick the script back up. Skip the third paragraph entirely if they have already located it.]

Find the urge in your body. Not the thought about it — the thought will be loud, let it be loud. Find the physical part. Somewhere there is a sensation that goes with wanting. It might be in your chest, your throat, your stomach, your jaw, your hands. It might be in more than one place at once. *[pause for 25 seconds]*

When you have found it, put your attention there and leave it there. If your mind goes to the reasons — why you want it, whether you should, what it would mean if you did — notice that, and come back to the sensation. The reasons are not the urge. The sensation is the urge. *[pause for 30 seconds]*

If you cannot find it anywhere, that is information too. Go through once more, slowly, from your scalp down to your feet, and take the first place that answers. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

03. Its actual shape

1 min 45

[The number is a record, not a target. If a client reports it dropping and looks pleased, stay flat — 'you noticed it changed' — and read on. Any celebration of a lower number teaches them that the point was the drop.]

Now describe it to yourself in ordinary words. How big is it? Does it have edges, or does it fade out at the sides? Is it hot, cold, tight, heavy, buzzing, hollow? Is it sitting still, or is it moving? *[pause for 30 seconds]*

Give it a number between zero and ten for how strong it is right now. Do not think about it. Take the first number that arrives. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

Keep watching it. Every so often the number will change. When it does, just note the new one and carry on watching. You are not trying to bring it down. You are keeping a record of what it does. *[pause for 40 seconds]*

04. Riding it

1 min 45

[If they brace — breath held, hands gripping the chair, feet pushing into the floor — name it once, gently, and go straight back to the text. Bracing is fighting the wave, and it is the most common way this practice gets quietly turned into resistance.]

Urges come in waves. This one has a rise, a top, and a fall, whether or not you do anything about it. Right now you may be somewhere on the rise. It may get stronger than it is at this moment. That is allowed. That is a wave doing what waves do. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

Your breath is the board you ride on. Not to calm yourself down — to stay on top of the water. Breathe with the urge as it climbs. If it gets sharper, breathe with the sharper part of it. Let it be as big as it is and stay up on it. *[pause for 40 seconds]*

You are not underneath this. You are on it. It is carrying you and you are staying on top, and nothing about that requires you to act. *[pause for 30 seconds]*

05. The far side

1 min 30

[Do not let the room go quiet after the last line — take the invitation to talk immediately. The debrief is where the client's own data about the shape of their wave gets recorded, and that is the part they take into next week.]

Somewhere in the last few minutes it will have had a top. It might have been right at the start. It might have been a moment ago. Look back over it and see whether you can find the peak. *[pause for 25 seconds]*

Take a number again, whatever it is. If it is lower than before, you have watched a wave come down on its own, without being fought and without being fed. If it is the same, or higher, you have stayed on top of it this entire time and not acted. Both of those are the skill. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

The urge will come again. When it does you will know something about its shape, and you will know you can be on it rather than under it. Open your eyes when you are ready, and tell me what you saw.

USAGE

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