



Leaves on a Stream (Developed by Dr. Russ Harris) helps detangle you from the thoughts that cause suffering or pain. Similar to Fry's strategy in the book *Lotus Flowers and Superpowers*, in which we see the young Koi place her thoughts into the bubbles that come from her gills and watch them rise gently toward the pond's surface.

Goal: To recognize that we are observers of our thoughts, not the thoughts themselves. And that we can learn to let go of our attachment to the thoughts that are unhelpful.

- Leaves on a Stream is not a distraction technique - a way to escape painful thoughts and feelings. It is a mindfulness exercise.
- It is normal to get distracted. Be kind to yourself, and don't judge; just bring your attention back to "here and now" when you realize it is happening.
- Practice this exercise regularly and when you are not in a distressed state. This way, you will have the skills and the memory of how to do it when needed.
- Adapt positioning, script, and timing for your own purpose/situation/participants.

Exercise

Find a comfortable place to sit, lay or stand where you know you will not be disturbed. Uncross your legs and arms if you can, and rest your hands in a comfortable position.

Close your eyes gently or fix them on a point in front of you.

- Start by breathing comfortably in and out for a while. Notice what the breaths sound and feel like and how they affect your body.

Pause

- Now, I'd like you to imagine that you are sitting or standing by the bank of a gently flowing stream, watching the water flow by. You can feel the ground beneath you and hear the water. Observe this space for a while; notice the colors, the gentle breeze, if there is one, and the patterns the water makes as it ripples over stones.

Pause

- Imagine there are leaves from the surrounding trees gently fluttering into the water. They are all shapes, sizes, and colors. Take time to watch as they leisurely float by on the water's surface.

Pause





- Start to become aware of your thoughts, feelings, and/or sensations.
Pause
- Each time you notice one, imagine placing it on a leaf and letting it float downstream. Do this with each thought – pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Even if you have a wonderful thought, place it on a leaf and watch as it makes its way downstream.
Pause
- If your thoughts stop, just examine the water. Eventually, your thoughts will start up again.
Pause
- Allow the stream to flow at its own pace. You are not trying to rush the leaves along or get rid of your thoughts – Just allow them to come and go.
Pause
- If a leaf gets stuck, let it hang around until it is ready to move on. If it comes up again, watch it go by another time.
Pause
- If you have thoughts, feelings, or sensations about this exercise, place them on a leaf with the others.
Pause
- You may get distracted from being fully present. Your thoughts might hook you and take you in another direction. This is to be expected. If this happens, just gently bring yourself back to the stream and watch the leaves move along.
Pause

When you are ready, let the image of the stream melt away and allow your attention to focus again on your position and this room.

Gently open your eyes and stretch if you want to.

Take a couple of slow, purposeful breaths.

Be aware of where you are in the room and if there are others with you.

Welcome back.

