

Riding the Wave of Your Urges

Name:

Date:

Objective

To ride out unhealthy urges and impulses using the Ride the Wave visualization technique.

You Should Know

When you experience unhealthy urges during times of distress, you may notice fluctuations in their intensity. Urges are like ocean waves that strengthen, peak, and eventually crash. When you try to eliminate your urges, they can take longer to subside. If you give in to the impulses, they can increase in power. However, when you ride the wave of your urges like a surfer on the ocean, you can observe and accept those urges without taking any action.

What to Do

Try the following Ride the Wave visualization technique next time you have an unhealthy urge or impulse to revisit an undesirable habit. With practice, your urges will become easier to withstand, providing the opportunity for you to identify healthier behaviors to manage your emotions.

Find a quiet, comfortable space to sit where you will not be disturbed or distracted. Focus on your breath and your body's sensations throughout this exercise. Close your eyes if you wish.

- Take a few moments to notice where in your body you experience the urge. You might observe sensations in your stomach, in your mouth, or another area.
- Focus your attention on the part of your body connected to the urge. If you notice the urge in more than one area, start with the section that feels most intense. Do you feel tension, pressure, discomfort, tingling, or warmth? It may be helpful to describe the sensations in an objective and nonjudgmental manner. ("I notice warmth and tingling in my belly.") Go through this exercise with each body part where you notice the urge.
- Pay attention to your breath for the next 1–2 minutes as you inhale and exhale deeply.
- Return your focus to the body part(s) where you feel the urge. Notice any sensations that arise. Imagine sending your breath to the areas where you feel the urge. Observe if, and how, the sensations change as you watch them. Practice this step for at least one minute.
- Imagine your urge's physical sensations are a wave. Watch the wave rise and fall repeatedly as the intensity of the sensations crest and subside. Imagine your breathing is a surfboard riding these waves. No matter how big the wave gets, or how afraid you are of falling off the board, imagine you are a professional surfer who can handle each wave as it comes. Practice this for at least one minute.
- As you ride the wave or notice sensations describe the sensations again, in an objective and nonjudgmental way ("I notice the warmth in my belly is getting cooler").
- Take a few more deep breaths and open your eyes.

Describe how it felt to notice your urges without acting on them.

What physical sensations did you notice as you Rode the Wave?

What thoughts and emotions arose as you Rode the Wave?

Reflections on This Exercise Did the intensity of your urges change as a result of the exercise? Explain.

Did the intensity of your thoughts and emotions change as a result of the exercise? Explain.

Identify an upcoming situation where using the Ride the Wave exercise will be useful.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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