

The Power of a Child's Imagination

Visualization can help children sleep, improve their health and attain their goals
Excerpt from the Floppy Sleep Game by Patti Teel
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When you dream, you are free...to be the things you want to be.
When you dream, you are free...to see the things you want to see.
Sometimes in my dreams I fly, through the starry, starry sky.
When I see the moon I laugh, it's a great big bed for the tall giraffe.

Most people have used creative visualization their entire lives, long before they knew there was a name for it. Children have vivid imaginations and creative visualization usually comes quite naturally to them. However, because we have so many ready made images from such sources as TV, computers, video games, etc., it is more important than ever to encourage and provide opportunities for our children to use their imaginations.

At first, when using creative visualization with your children, start by providing the structure—taking your son or daughter on an imaginary journey. I think of it as interactive storytelling, your child experiences the story as if he or she is truly living it. Later, your children will come up with their own ideas and pictures, seeing or imagining them in their “dream minds.” Visualization skills are enhanced through practice, and before you know it, your child will be effortlessly visualizing scenarios of his own choosing as he drifts off to sleep.

Some people think that visualization is ineffective for them if they don't actually ‘see’ images in their minds. Most children are able to actually see images, however, even if they don't, the process is still useful. If children (or adults) can remember events that have already happened, then they have the ability to visualize, creating something in their imaginations that is not happening in the here and now. It's conjuring for the sheer purpose of making yourself feel good.

I call the blurred time between awake and asleep, “twilight time,” a perfect time to use creative visualization. We give our sons and daughters a precious gift when we teach them to treasure this magical time. During “twilight time,” the conscious mind is relaxed enough to be carried away with a freedom not typically experienced in a totally awakened state. At this point children have actually entered a meditative state; their brain waves are operating at a slow enough rate (often called the theta state) to facilitate creative visualization and sleep. As a child, long before I'd heard of the term “visualization,” I would move seamlessly from my nightly visualization into a dream; in effect choosing the opening scene of the first evening's dream.

As children thoroughly relax and the line between asleep and awake fades, their visualizations may gradually transform into dreams. This is also a time when positive affirmations and thoughts can be extremely powerful as they more easily enter a child's subconscious mind. It is very effective to intersperse positive thoughts and affirmations throughout a visualization. Be sure to focus the attention of these statements and affirmations on what you want for your child, rather than what you don't want. For instance, if your child has been sick, naturally you hope he (or she) gets well. It's important that the statements and affirmations that you choose focus on wellness, rather than on not wanting to be sick. This may seem inconsequential, however, by focusing on what is not wanted, rather than what is wanted, you may inadvertently be inviting it into your life.

We help our children to create their own experiences by encouraging them to visualize or imagine themselves obtaining their heart's desire. By imagining that they already have what they desire, children will be allowing it and welcoming it into their reality. Pure desire is a wonderful thing; it is a feeling of expectation and anticipation. Parents sometimes ask me if visualizing the attainment of goals teaches children to expect them without putting forth the necessary effort. In fact, the opposite is true. By focusing on what they want, children will be drawn to the opportunities and experiences that will bring them closer to their goals. People often confuse desire with yearning, which focuses on not having what we desire. One of the easiest ways to differentiate yearning from desire is to pay attention to how it feels. Desire brings forth joy, eagerness and expectation while yearning is likely to be associated with feelings of discouragement and pessimism.

TIME OUT WITH PATTI TEEL

DREAM THE DREAM AND STEP INTO IT

Affirmations should focus on what is wanted, rather than the lack of it.

Focusing on what you want:

You will fall asleep easily.

You feel happy.

You will wake up feeling refreshed.

You will feel well.

Sweet Dreams

Focusing on the lack of it:

You won't have trouble falling asleep.

You won't be unhappy.

You won't wake up tired.

You won't feel sick.

I hope you don't have nightmares.

Visualization is a wonderful way to drift off to sleep, but it provides other benefits as well. For instance, children can use visualization to promote healing and wellness. Our minds and bodies are not separate entities—they are connected. When a child creates positive pictures and self-suggestion, it can have a beneficial effect on both his physical and emotional health. It sounds simplistic; however, children who picture themselves as happy and healthy will be taking an important step towards becoming happy and healthy. Happiness and improved health are gifts that each child can give himself through the power of his own imagination.

Dubbed “The Dream Maker” by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.