

Leaves on a Stream (Outdoor Version)

A Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy ACT Defusion Worksheet

Purpose:

This exercise helps you practice *cognitive defusion*, which is the act of learning to observe thoughts without getting entangled in them. By using water and leaves as a metaphor, you practice letting thoughts come and go rather than trying to control or eliminate them.

Setting the Scene

Find a safe place beside moving water (a creek, river, lake with visible movement).

If outdoor water is unavailable, sit comfortably and imagine a gentle stream flowing in front of you.

Sit or stand in a relaxed but alert posture.

Take 3 slow breaths.

Part 1: Anchoring in Sensory Awareness

Before working with thoughts, ground yourself in the present moment.

1. What do you notice right now?

- Sounds of water: _____
- Other sounds nearby: _____
- Sensation of air on your skin: _____
- Smells in the environment: _____
- Physical contact (feet on ground, body supported): _____

Pause here for 1–2 minutes simply noticing.

Part 2: Observing the Stream

Look at the water (or imagine it clearly).

2. Describe the movement of the water:
(Fast? Slow? Smooth? Swirling?)

3. Notice how objects move within it. Do they resist? Do they float?

Allow the stream to be exactly as it is. No fixing. No adjusting.

Part 3: Placing Thoughts on Leaves

Now shift your attention to your internal experience.

4. What thought has been bothering you recently?
(A worry, self-criticism, fear, regret)

Imagine placing this thought on a leaf.

If you were to write the exact words of the thought on that leaf, what would they say?

“

”

Now visualize the leaf resting on the water and floating away at its own pace.

No pushing. No holding. Just allowing. Observe and describe it to yourself as it drifts away into the distance.

Part 4: Repetition and Practice

For the next several minutes:

- Each time a thought arises, place it on a leaf.
- Let the leaf float.
- If the leaf gets stuck, just notice that too.
- If you lose track and get pulled into the thought, gently return to the stream.

After practicing:

6. What types of thoughts showed up most often?

7. Did any thoughts feel “stickier” than others? If so, what were they?

8. What did you notice about your urge to control or argue with certain thoughts?

Part 5: Expanding Awareness

Now broaden your attention again.

9. What sounds, sensations, or movements do you notice right now?

10. How is your body feeling compared to when you started?

Part 6: Reflection

11. What did you learn about the nature of thoughts during this exercise?

12. How might observing thoughts instead of fighting them support you in living according to your values?

Key Reminder

Thoughts are events in the mind, not commands.

Like leaves on water, they can be noticed and allowed to pass without responding or reacting to them in any way. The stream keeps flowing whether you grab at the leaves or not.