

Coping imagery

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Purpose

This exercise aims to help the client increase his/her ability to cope with difficult and/or challenging situations. It is a stress-proofing exercise that helps to increase psychological resilience.

Description

Once the coaching relationship is established, the client is provided with a rationale as to why it may be useful to use coping imagery as a strategy to assist in the management of the difficult situation that s/he is facing, for example, if s/he needs to prepare for an important presentation, difficult team meeting or an interview.

The rationale behind using coping imagery is that if the client can imagine him or herself dealing with a situation by visualizing it, this provides an opportunity of practising the range of coping strategies that are discussed in the coaching session in a safe environment with the coach. By doing this, the client gets an opportunity of trying out such strategies using his/her imagination and, as a by-product, also gets the opportunity of experiencing a sense of control when s/he is able to deal with a situation effectively. It also offers the opportunity of fine tuning the coping strategies to be used by the client, should the client discover problems in applying these while imagining dealing with the situation in question.

This exercise can also be used as a tool to help the client

to imagine a different future that might involve significant change, for example, if the individual is faced with taking up a new role within an organization. The coach can also refer back to the research available in the psychological arena that supports the premise of 'role rehearsal' and how, by imagining a successful outcome, such an outcome is more likely to be achieved.

Process

When being used as a tool for dealing with a difficult situation, the client is asked to sit comfortably and imagine the situation that is causing the difficulty. S/he is then encouraged to visualize the situation. For example, if the client is concerned about giving a major presentation, s/he is asked to imagine who would be there, the sights, sounds, smells, layout of the room and the presentation that is to be given. S/he is then encouraged to imagine what coping strategies (including any that have been discussed in the session, such as breathing exercises) could be used and to imagine the presentation taking place successfully. When the client is able to imagine a positive outcome, this provides a sense of emotional control over the situation and the degree of difficulty can be increased. For example, the client could imagine giving the presentation in a calm manner and then imagine that a person in the audience is looking bored or asks a question and how s/he would cope with this. It is important to encourage the client to visualize all aspects of the situation from arriving to give the presentation, setting up the room, seeing the audience and how they are reacting to the presentation to dealing with any concerns s/he might have of challenging situations that could arise.

Once the client has successfully completed this exercise in the coaching session, s/he can practise the exercise as a homework assignment.

Pitfalls

There are normally no associated pitfalls with this exercise.

Bibliography

Palmer, S. and Dryden, W. (1995) *Counselling for Stress Problems*,
London: Sage Publications.