The Magic Ice Cream Palace
Source: Jose Colon, M.D., MPH

**Recommended Age Range:** 3–10
**Treatment Modality:** Individual, Group, Family

**Goals**
- Utilize a calming strategy in preparation for sleep
- Increase self-regulation skills
- Develop mindfulness

**Description**
This activity can be used in therapy sessions to teach relaxation and mindfulness skills. Alternatively, therapists can coach parents on the use of guided imagery and then parents can use this technique with their child at home.

Instruct the child to get into a comfortable position. Using an engaging tone, read the following guided imagery script to the child. Note that if the script has been read a few times the physical script may not be needed if the story is remembered (or personalized).

**Therapist Notes:**
This technique allows therapists to introduce the concepts of mindfulness and relaxation training to children. It also allows therapists to coach parents on the use of guided imagery.

The story can be modified to incorporate other settings. This provides an opportunity to build on skills, provide personalization, and increase engagement.

There are interactive sections within the script that invite input from the child. However, keep in mind (if modifying the story) that asking too many questions during a story may take the child out of the dream-like state.

After reading the story, additional activities can be incorporated, such as inviting the child to draw a wonderland. Or the child can create a fuzzy ball representing the cherry on top of ice cream that he/she can hold before sleep.

Therapists are encouraged to give a copy of the script to the parents, as well as the post story discussion, which may educate parents on aspects of sleep hygiene and relaxation training that they may not have previously considered.
Once upon a time—the time is now—a young child decides to use their wonderful imagination to visit the Magic Ice Cream Palace.

The child walks up many hills to get there. However, the hills are not made of grass. They are scoops of vanilla ice cream. He/She (use gender of your child) feels the cold softness on his/her feet.

The child sees a river of melted chocolate and wishes his/her feet were warm.

The boy/girl wants your help. Close your eyes. Take a calming in-breath through your nose. Bring your attention to your feet and breathe out slowly.

The boy/girl hears the sound of cool air pass through his/her nose. He/She feels the air turn warm and silky as he/she breathes out slowly. He/She looks down and sees warm chocolate boots. He/She feels a calming sensation on his/her feet.

As he/she walks, he/she leaves chocolate footprints on the ice cream hills. A cold wind blows and hardens the chocolate footprints.

Did you know this is how they make chocolate-chip ice cream in the Magic Ice Cream Palace?

The cold wind makes boy’s/girl’s legs and knees shiver.

The boy/girl wants your help. Close your eyes. Take a relaxing in-breath through your nose. Bring your attention to your legs and breathe out slowly. Bring your attention to your knees and breathe out slowly.

The boy/girl thinks of his/her favorite color, which is (ask your child). He/She opens his/her eyes and looks down. He/She is wearing (color your child selected) snow pants. He/She feels a calming sensation in his/her legs.

As he/she walks around with his/her (color) snow pants, the ice cream turns (color).

Did you know this is how they make (?) ice cream in the Magic Ice Cream Palace?

(Green → mint chocolate-chip)
(Brown → chocolate)
(Pink → bubblegum)
(Yellow → lemon)
(Try to incorporate the child’s favorite ice cream)

The child reaches the hilltop and looks down. He/She sees a slope. Thinking it would be fun to slide down the hill, he/she sits down. He/She realizes his/her hips and bottom are cold!

The child wants your help. Close your eyes. Take a peaceful in-breath through your nose. Bring your attention to your hips and breathe out slowly. Bring your attention to your seat and breathe out slowly.
He/She finds himself/herself sitting on a banana sled. He/She feels a calming sensation in his/her lower body.

He/She glides down the slope. He/She swerves to picks strawberries. He/She sees a big walnut tree and swerves to the other side to avoid it.

The child crashes into the tree. The banana sled splits in half. The strawberries seep into the ice cream. The tree falls over and splashes into the chocolate river. Chocolate splashes all over the ice cream. The walnuts break to pieces and scatter everywhere.

Did you know this is how they make banana split sundaes in the Magic Ice Cream Palace?

The child feels happy and lies down to make a snow angel. Now his/her back, shoulders and arms are cold.

The child wants your help. Close your eyes. Take a refreshing in-breath through your nose. Bring your attention to your back and breathe out. Bring your attention to your shoulders and breathe out.

He/She is now wearing a magic waffle cone coat. He/She feels it is keeping him warm and toasty. He/she feels a calming sensation in his/her chest, shoulders and arms.

The child makes snow angels in the ice cream, fluffing the cream.

Did you know this is how they make whipped cream in the Magic Ice Cream Palace?

The child hears children playing and laughing. He/She looks over and sees two children and one little pink elephant playing. They are throwing snowballs made of ice cream. “Come play with us,” calls little pink elephant. The little pink elephant likes to catch snowflakes made of rainbow sprinkles with the tip of his/her trunk.

The child reaches down to make an ice cream snowball. However, his/her hands are cold.

The child wants your help. Close your eyes. Take a mind clearing in-breath through your nose. Bring your awareness to the palms of your hands and breathe out slowly. Bring your awareness to your thumbs and breathe out slowly. Bring your awareness to your fingertips and breathe out slowly.

He/She sees warm gloves on his/her hands. He/She feels a calming sensation in his/her hands.

He/She joins the ice cream snowball fun. He/She smells freshly baked cakes and sees them cooling on the windowsill of Miss Barbara’s Bakery. Ice cream powder dusts them all over.

Did you know this is how they make ice cream cake in the Magic Ice Cream Palace?

The child sees it is getting dark. His/Her body is warm, but his/her neck and head feel cold.
The child wants your help. Close your eyes. Take a sleepy in-breath through your nose. Bring your awareness to your neck and breathe out slowly. Bring your awareness to your head and breathe out slowly.

The child is now wearing a warm waffle cone scarf and hat. He/She feels a calming sensation all around his/her head, and his/her mind feels clear and happy. He/She yawns.

All the children feel calm and happy. They follow WASO the owl as they walk through the hall of magic bedroom doors. The children find a door that matches their own.

The older children open the door for the little children first.

The child finds his/her door and is magically in his/her room. He/She is wearing his/her pajamas. He/She still feels the calming sensation of his/her boots, snow pants, gloves and headgear. While in bed, he/she even does another body scan, bringing his/her focused attention to his/her feet all the way up his/her body. Before he/she is finished, he/she scans one more part of his/her body—the heart.

He/She smiles softly. He/She feels a calming sensation in his/her heart and mind.

Once upon a time—the time is now—when you close your eyes and rest your head on a soft pillow, the story becomes your own.

Discussion

Sleep Hygiene

Bedtime can be difficult for parents and children, but it doesn't have to be. Bedtime has the opportunity to be a bonding experience for children and parents. Using going to bed early as a punishment may lead to sleep-avoiding behavior. Emphasizing bedtime as story time builds a positive experience your child may look forward to and remember life long.

Encourage Creativity

Encourage the development of the child's wonderful imagination. There may be features of an illustration a child may want to expand upon. As parents, guide this with statements such as “Hmmm, I wonder what kind of ice cream that makes” when the strawberries fall out.

Note: Asking too many questions during a story may take the child out of the dream-like state and they may become tangential.

Sleep-Avoiding Behavior

Just before going to bed, the mind is often receptive to thoughts and ideas. As adults, if we have work or stress related thoughts prior to bed, we have a tendency to repeat these words in our head. This is evident when an adult states their mind has “racing thoughts” while in bed. Racing thoughts in a child may lead
to sleep-avoiding behavior. This is evident in children when they come out and ask for water, hugs or express, “I need to tell you something.” Stories help calm the mind.

Emphasizing the silly fun of a story before bed helps reduce the initial sleep-avoiding behavior of getting into bed.

**Calming the Mind**

The left hemisphere of your brain is your language area; it is logical and likes words. It can be a source of racing thoughts. The right hemisphere of your brain is creative and imaginative. When you stimulate the right hemisphere with imagination, the verbal centers of the left hemisphere are effectively shushed.

Children and adults alike have racing thoughts; children, however, are still developing their self-regulation skills for impulse control. A child may see a new toy and run to it, then see a friend and leave the toy, feel an itch in their nose and pick it, and so forth as they run amok. Commonly with the mention of story time, a child comes to a wide-eyed halt as the creative world of the right brain shushes the left brain. Encouraging them to use their wonderful imagination with their eyes closed may help calm the racing mind.

**Relaxation Response**

Body scan is a method used to help control the racing mind. This technique has been found useful for improving sleep, decreasing stress and improving comfort (decreasing pain). In body scan, beginning with a particular body part, one would focus on soothing sensations. Each body part is relaxed for approximately less than a minute.

By practicing this with children, the child also is practicing skills of focused attention. Over time, as the child’s focused attention skills are cultivated, they will be able to scan each body part a little longer and learn to form a relaxation response for self-regulation.

**Follow Your Breath**

Once or twice within the book, as your child interacts, ask them about their breathing. Is your breath cool when you breathe in? Is your breath warm and silky when you breathe out?

Emphasize to the child to breathe out slowly to help get more of the warm feelings. People often say, “Take a deep breath” to calm down. However, a better way to visualize this is to “Breath out slowly.” It’s the exhalation that calms the body and mind.

Yogic breathing and mindfulness practice emphasize longer exhalations and shorter natural inhalations. Ask the child to listen to the sound of the air passing
back and forth through his or her airway; ask them to “Follow your breath”. This evokes a relaxation response and cultivates self-regulation. You may also have them imitate the wind by softly blowing on the pages to allow the pages to turn. Note: When you see them yawning, you taught them just right!

The Present Moment

In this story we emphasize living in the present moment, which is why it was written in the present tense. This also empowers the child to continue the story in their mind once their eyes close. When a child embraces their wonderful imagination and can exercise self-regulation skills, this may help reduce disruptive behavior in the daytime as well as reduce sleep-avoiding behavior at night.

Social Skills

In everyday life when you see the child experiencing a moment similar to the story in the book, remind them about how a character reacted in the story. For example, the older children open the door for the younger children. Compliment your kids when they hold the door open for others, just like at The Magic Ice Cream Palace.

Mirroring

When a parent practices a form of relaxation therapy, a child may mirror this themselves. Kids often mirror parental habits. Even a toddler with a one-word phrase vocabulary may pick up a toy phone, tilt their head and say, “Hello” as they’ve seen their parent do this. Parents are encouraged to develop their own relaxation responses, whether it is through mindfulness, yoga, self-hypnosis or meditation. Parents can also incorporate this with their children through play therapy.

References


About The Author
Jose Colon, M.D., MPH, is dual board certified in sleep medicine and neurology with special qualifications in child neurology. Dr. Colon is the founder of Paradise Sleep, an organization dedicated to education in sleep health. He also has a Master’s in Public Health, in Child and Maternal Health, and through Paradise Sleep he educates on sleep health.

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