The imagination is a powerful tool and can help those with eczema to overcome the urge to scratch. Two techniques that can be used to harness this power are relaxation and guided imagery.

**Relaxation** – relaxation is a skill that gets better the more we practice it. If we learn to relax our muscles and our minds we can escape the tense feelings and upsetting thoughts that eczema can generate. Some people may listen to their favourite music or read a book to relax, while others would benefit from someone reading the script below to them.

**Guided imagery** – listening to a story is a good way to distract your mind from what’s happening with your skin, whatever your age. Being asked to imagine all the sights, sounds, textures and smells in a place – as in the guided imagery story in the script below – is a simple but effective way to focus the mind while helping it to control the urge to scratch.

With practice, the listener can select a word that they can then say to themselves outside the sessions to help control the itching. This might be a word from the story such as ‘snow’ or ‘magic pool’ or something that reflects the feelings they are trying to generate within, such as ‘relax’ or ‘calm’.

The relaxation and guided imagery script below has been specifically designed for use with children but can benefit all ages.

Parents and carers should ensure that they have enough time to complete the exercise in full and should choose a quiet and restful location, with the listener either sitting in a chair or lying down, whichever position they feel most comfortable in.

**Parent or carer:**

‘Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. As you breathe out imagine that you are breathing out any tension or worries. And as you breathe in imagine you are breathing in calmness and relaxation. At the same time, start to let your body relax.

Now you’re going to start tensing and relaxing the muscles in your body in turn, beginning with your hands. Clench your hands into fists, squeeze them tightly and hold this for a few seconds... one... two... let go slowly. Notice the change from tension to relaxation in your hands and allow your hands to feel soft and floppy and relaxed. Now once more, squeeze your hands tightly into fists and hold it for one... two... and relax and notice how the muscles in your hands feel nice and soft when they relax.

Moving on to your arms. Bend your arms at the elbow and touch your shoulders with your hands. Squeeze the muscles in your arms tight and hold for one... two... and let them go. Let your arms relax and fall by your side. As they go soft and floppy, like spaghetti, notice the change from tension to relaxation. And again, bending your arms at the elbow touch your shoulders with your hands and squeeze your muscles tight to let the tension build up... one... two... and relax. Notice your arms becoming more and more relaxed.

Now, hunch your shoulders up to your ears. Feel the tension in your neck and shoulders... hold it one... two... and then relax. Let your shoulders fall back to their resting position. Notice how differently they feel when they are relaxed. And again lift your shoulders up to your ears, hold them there... and then let them go. Relax.

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Moving on to your legs. First, point your toes downwards, hold this position and feel the tension build up in the front of your legs... hold it... and now let go. Let your legs relax in their resting position. Now pointing your toes again... hold it... one... two... and let go. Relax. Feel how relaxed your legs become.
And now point your toes upwards so you build tension up in the back of your legs. Hold it… one… two… and relax. Let your legs return to the resting position. Let them go, just like jelly. Notice the change from tension to relaxation in the backs of your legs. And again point your toes upwards, hold… one… two… and then relax. Relax.

Now, your stomach. Take a deep breath and hold it for 3 seconds, tensing the muscles in your stomach as you do. Hold it for one… two… three… and then breathe out slowly. Notice the change from tension to relaxation in your stomach muscles and allow this change to continue further and further still so your stomach muscles become more and more relaxed. And again, take a deep breath in, hold it for one… two… three and let your breath out slowly. And as you breathe out imagine you are blowing away any worries or troubles.

Now, moving up to your face. Clench your teeth tightly together. Hold it for one… two… and then relax. Let the tension go out of your jaw. Notice how different it feels when it’s relaxed. And again clench your teeth tightly together, build up the tension in your jaw… one… two… and now relax. Let your face relax more and more.

Wrinkle your nose up. Notice how tightly you can wrinkle it and hold it for one… two… and then let it relax. Notice the change. And again, wrinkle your nose up tightly one… two… and relax. Notice the change from tension to relaxation in the muscles around the front of your face, and allow these muscles to relax more and more.

Shut your eyes tightly. Squeeze them tight and hold for one… two… and relax. Let all the tension slip away from your eyes – let it all go. And again, squeeze your eyes tightly shut. Hold it one… two… and relax. Notice the change from tension to relaxation around your eyes and let yourself become more and more relaxed.

Now that you’ve done all your muscle exercises, check that all areas of your body are as relaxed as can be…

- Think of your hands and allow them to relax a little more.
- Think of your arms and allow them to relax a little more.
- Think of your shoulders and allow them to relax a little more.
- Think of your legs and allow them to relax a little more.
- Think of your stomach and allow it to relax a little more.
- Think of your face and allow it to relax a little more.

Now think of your breathing.

Breathe in… one… two… three… and out slowly… one… two… three… four and again.

Breathe in… one… two… three… and out slowly… one… two… three… four and again.

Breathe in… one… two… three… and out slowly… one… two… three… four and again.

And now, while you are very relaxed, I would like you to choose your own special, private place where you know you can feel safe and happy and enjoy being yourself. It might be a favourite place where you often go, or it might be a place you have imagined. What is important is that you should feel safe and comfortable in this special place of yours. Pay attention to all the things you can see, hear, touch, taste and smell in this special place. As I count from 1 to 10, settle yourself down in this special place.

Are you ready now? 1… 2… 3… 4… 5… 6… 7… 8… 9… 10…. Very good. Now choose what you would like to do in your special place – whatever you would like to do to help you relax more and more.

Now as you relax in your special place, there are other things you can do to help yourself. Perhaps you would like to imagine you are walking in a forest of fir trees. It has been snowing and you take some cool soft snow from the glistening trees and put it gently to your skin. As you do so, you notice any itching disappearing and your skin becomes soft, smooth and healed.

And now, I’m going to ask you to imagine a beautiful magic pool in your special place. You go over to the pool – the water is clear and you can see fish of all colours swimming about. You go over to the pool and dip your toes in. The water feels cool and delicious, and you decide to get in.

As you float in your magic pool, you feel the cool water on your arms, your legs, your back and shoulders. Feel how
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cool and soothing it is, how it cools your skin and stops any itching. Enjoy floating in your magic pool for as long as you like, just relaxing, and letting the water take away any roughness and any itching. And when you are ready, you can get out of your pool and lay back and relax.

And now, I am going to ask you to imagine that you are making some very special cream. You have a big mixing bowl and I would like you to put into that mixing bowl all your happy feelings and memories. Don’t put any bad feelings or memories – only the things that make you feel good. Perhaps you could put into the mixing bowl the names of all the people who help you to feel happy. Perhaps you could put in all the good things you know about yourself. Put in all the things you are pleased about or proud of. Now stir the mixture round so that it forms a rich smooth cream.

Take as much of that cream as you need and gently rub it into your skin, covering your legs, arms, face, back, stomach, everywhere. Feel how comforting it is as the cream softens and soothes you, leaving your skin feeling soft and smooth. And feel how the magic cream stops your skin from itching. Feel how it stops you from wanting to scratch just by sinking into your skin and making it feel calm and soft and smooth.

In a moment, I shall count back from 10 to 1. If you are listening to this at night and would like to fall asleep and wake up refreshed in the morning, you can do this, or you might prefer to open your eyes as I count and feel refreshed and awake. It’s up to you, but remember that you can visit your special place, swim in the magic pool and put on your magic cream, anytime you want to – just by relaxing and using your imagination.

10... 9... 8... 7... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1....’