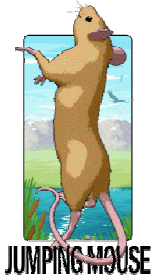


BE-Inspired NLP Hypnotherapy Practice

Introduction to Clinical Hypnosis and Hypnotherapy



By Judith E. Pearson, Ph.D.

What are Hypnosis and Trance?

Hypnosis is a method of communication that induces a trance. Hypnosis can be conducted by one individual addressing another, or it may be conducted by the self addressing the subconscious (self-hypnosis). Trance is a naturally occurring state in which one's attention is narrowly focused and relatively free of distractions. People go into and out of trance spontaneously throughout the day, mostly when concentrating on something. In trance, the attention may be focused either internally (on thoughts – through internal self-talk, images, or both) or externally (on a task, a book, or a movie, for example). The focus of attention is so narrow that other stimuli in the environment are ignored or blocked out of conscious awareness for a time. Examples of trance states are daydreaming, deep concentration, and some forms of medication.

Clinical hypnosis was approved by the American Medical Association in 1958. Clinical hypnosis, also called hypnotherapy, is the use of hypnosis in a medical, psycho-educational, or therapeutic setting. Hypnotherapy is rarely used in isolation. It is one of many therapeutic methods available to a practitioner. A cognitive therapy, client-centered therapy, psychodynamics, eye-movement therapy, thought field therapy, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, and other brief, solution-oriented approaches. Clinical hypnosis is best suited to individual counseling and is generally not recommended for couples counseling, marriage and family therapy, or group counseling.

As an adjunct to psychotherapy or counseling, clinical hypnosis can help the client obtain a relaxed, comfortable, trance state for visualizing and obtaining specific therapeutic outcomes. It is theorized that trance increases suggestibility. With clinical hypnosis, the therapist can make suggestions designed to help the client formulate specific internal processes (feelings, memories, images, and self talk) that can lead to mutually agreed upon outcomes – changes in behaviour and emotions. Hypnotic suggestions can best influence subsequent behaviour when the listener is (a) co-operative, relaxed, receptive and open to the suggestions; (b) motivated to get the outcome; and (c) anticipates and envisions that the suggestions will result in success.

Formal trance methods usually include instructions for relaxation and concentration. Trance is facilitated through hypnotic language patterns, which include guided visualizations; stories; accessing memories; analogies, ambiguous words or phrases, repetition, and statements about association, meaning and cause and effect. A hypnotherapist may make references to those aspects of the mind that are not readily available to conscious awareness. This part of the mind may be variously referred to as the subconscious mind, the unconscious mind, the inner mind, a 'part' of the your mind, or your higher wisdom.

Myths and Misconceptions about Clinical Hypnosis

Hypnosis is not mind control or brainwashing. Research has shown that attempts to 'brainwash' people through extreme methods such as physical and mental duress have proven ineffective, except in causing states of depression, anxiety, and confusion. Some people worry that hypnosis could cause them to do something against their will or that could endanger them. Research shows that this is not the case. Hypnosis is a method of influence, and, depending on the skills of the practitioner and the receptivity of the listener, it is no more or less powerful than any other kind or method of psychological persuasion,

manipulation, or motivation (such as advertising or propaganda). The difference is that a qualified clinical environment, rapport, trust, and cooperation are essential for the success of hypnotherapy – or, in fact, of any other kind of psychotherapy.

People change their minds and actions throughout their lives. When such changes occur as a result of exposure to specific information, it is sometimes because this information has been presented through skillful persuasion and influence. A hypnotherapist uses communicative methods of persuasion and influence; so do people who advertise and market goods and services; so do teachers, politicians, lawyers, entertainers, parents, and ministers.

During light trance, you are not immobilized. You remain aware of your surroundings. In light trance, people can open their eyes, talk, and move around. In fact, most people in this type of trance are not aware of being 'hypnotized'. Most people can be hypnotized to some degree. Anyone who can be hypnotized can also be easily taught to bring himself or herself out of trance at any time. In fact, emerging from trance happens spontaneously when one is interrupted, as by a phone ringing.

The deepest levels of trance produce a dreamlike state. Some people become so relaxed in trance that they may fall asleep. This is not a problem because some part of the mind continues to listen to the voice of the hypnotherapist. Under hypnosis, many sleeping clients can still follow instructions such as moving a finger, taking a deep breath, or awakening themselves when told to do so. Many people required practice and training to routinely reach deep trance states, while a few people; seem to have a natural ability to do so.

There is no 'right' way to experience trance. People vary in suggestibility depending on their personality traits and moods. Some people enter trance easily, and some don't. One person may find it a deep, restful feeling. While another may experience a light, floating sensation. Some people hear every word the hypnotherapist says, while others allow their minds to drift to other thoughts. Some experience vivid imagery, while others do not. Some people remember the suggestions they hear, and some do not. Some people see results right away, and some people see results gradually over time, or even after a delay of a few days or weeks. Every person's experience of hypnosis is unique.

Additionally, there are dozens of ways to induce trance and make hypnotic suggestions. If one way doesn't work well for you, or doesn't seem to produce results, don't give up. Give your therapist some feedback on what is and isn't working, so that he or she can choose another method.

Hypnosis cannot solve every problem. Even with hypnosis, it is still necessary for you to do some conscientious planning and research about the outcome you choose. You should still expect to make conscious decisions, and you will have to take action to get results. Hypnosis is not a cure-all and it is not magic. Hypnosis can be effective in many cases, but there are no guarantees that hypnosis will work for everyone under every circumstance.

Risks and Precautions

Hypnosis carries very few risks. It is contraindicated for individuals with certain medical problems, for those who are actively abusing drugs or alcohol, or for those who are paranoid, psychotic, delusional, or hallucinatory. Hypnosis should not be used for physical problems, such as pain, unless the client has first consulted a physician to determine the underlying physical causes.

Formal hypnotic methods are not recommended for small children, because children lack the necessary attention span. More interactive treatment methods can be used, however, such as art therapy, play therapy, storytelling, and guided visualization, during which helpful suggestions can be made to the child.

Some clients request hypnotherapy for the purpose of recovering memories. Hypnosis may or may not be effective in this regard. Human memory is subjective, illusive, and sometimes

distorted. There is no reliable way to 'make' someone remember what he or she has forgotten, although hypnosis sometimes helps. When memories do surface in therapy, there is no guarantee that they are accurate or based on reality. False memories can occur not just under hypnosis, but in other circumstances as well.

In rare cases, after trance work, the person may feel somewhat disoriented. The therapist should ensure that you are fully alert and sufficiently energized to leave the therapists office and continue the days activities safely. In very rare cases, after a hypnotic session some people may experience mildly disturbing thoughts or feel sins. If this happens, you should call your therapist immediately for a follow up session.

Ericksonian Hypnosis

The type of hypnotherapy most frequently practiced today is Ericksonian hypnosis, named after the late Milton H. Erickson, M.D. From the 1930's to the 1980's Erickson was highly influential in integrating clinical hypnosis with medicine and psychotherapy. His hypnotic methods were permissive and respectful of the client. He established the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis and published the first professional journals and monographs on therapeutic hypnosis. The Ericksonian Foundation continues his work. Numerous books and articles have been written about Erickson and his methods. Mental health practitioners and clinicians can obtain training in Ericksonian hypnosis through continuing education and postgraduate programmes. Certified hypnotherapists are those who have met the credentialing standards of a national board or credentialing organization.