

CHILDREN AND HYPNOSIS

By: Del Hunter Morrill

Dear Del,

I have heard that children do very well with hypnosis. I hope this is true, because I have a child who really needs your help. He has a terrible time in school, doesn't want to go, doesn't do his homework, gets terribly angry with us...you name it! Can he be helped?

This is a letter that came to me out of a parent's deep concern for her child. She had run out of methods of dealing with him, and in desperation was looking for someone or some thing that could provide a solution to his problems. Encouragement from teachers had not worked, and counselors had been unable to affect change.

Childhood is a time of great discovery and of learning. But that discovery and learning can also be very stressful for children. Adults can sometimes forget this. While adults are taking care of major events, they can lose sight of the impact of those events upon their children, until a problem arises.

Children grapple with change, loss, self-esteem, and their own bodies as they move through rapid growth periods over short periods of time. They must deal with making new friends, handling bullies, unfamiliar schoolwork, and struggles to "belong". Sometimes the comparison to others can make feelings of inferiority or even depression rise to the surface.

Children, like adults, show their response to stress, change, grief and loss in many different ways. Schoolwork may begin to slide. The child may lose things, or steal them. He may become accident-prone or have headaches or stomachaches. She might bite her nails or pull her hair. Bedwetting may become a problem. Particular health problems like asthma and hay fever may be exacerbated. Stuttering may become more prominent.

A child can be bored with school, having trouble with playmates or teachers, be extra shy or worried about being called upon in class, be unable to comprehend a subject, or have to deal other incidences that cause him to have difficulties with his education.

There may be other problems that children develop. A child might have unreasonable fears that seem to have no basis: fear of the dark, fear about going to sleep, fear of needles, doctors or dentists; fear of animals or insects; fear of traveling; fear of people, etc. All the encouragement in the world doesn't seem to change the fear.

Children may have many reasons for doing unsociable things, for learning problems, or for fears, just as we adults do. The difference is that they have had less years of reinforcement of whatever imprints are causing their actions. Therefore, the use of hypnosis-which works with the imagination--can be highly effective in changing these responses, provided the issue is not seated in the parents or other persons who are closely related to the child's development.

In most instances, the imagination of children is still very keen. It is only with the interference of

well-meaning adults that imagination soon gives way to believing only what one can see and touch. How many adults have associated a child's imagination with "lying"? How many times has an imaginative child been told to "quit daydreaming."? Later on, it's "get real!"

Imagination is the doorway between the conscious mind and the unconscious levels of the mind. Therefore, it is relatively easy to reach the deeper levels in the mind of a child. Children respond well to stories, visualization, imaginative games and other simple tools.

Children are great discoverers. Given the opportunity, they are hungry and open to new learning. They enjoy responding to new ideas that are presented in a way that they can understand. Their openness makes them especially good subjects for hypnosis. When children work with adults they trust, they can become relaxed and focused easily, and are open to ideas that will help them to deal with the world they are facing, and any changes they must make to handle that world more easily.

In my own practice, I have helped many children learn to do their homework, go to school, and even improve their grades. I also have helped them with many other problems, like sucking their thumb, wetting the bed, sleepwalking, nightmares, stealing, anger, friendlessness, and low self-esteem. I have used hypnosis and counseling to help children deal with divorce or death in the family, and other traumas.

It is important for the child client to feel comfortable with the adult who will work with him, so I feel it is important to find a hypnotherapist (or a counselor who uses hypnosis as part of their practice) who likes working with children. He or she should be a therapist who either specializes in children, or who is used to working with them. Also, I encourage parents or grandparents to ask potential therapists for some examples of how the therapist has worked with their child's particular issue.

The first session should involve the child, parents and the therapist. It is a time for establishing some trust, and for the therapist and child to identify what the problem is and what they want to do about it. Just as with adults, it is important that the child wants to change and is willing to work with the therapist. Both parents and child should understand what hypnosis is and what it can do.

When I work with children, once the initial meeting has occurred, I have the parent relax in a room nearby. This allows the child to feel secure and the parent to continue to trust the therapist. If a child is adamant that the parent stay, I work within that decision. However, I find that the child is often more willing to tell you how she feels about her situation when the parent is not in the same room. I assure the child client, just as I do the adult client, that whatever she tells me is kept confidential.

When the child is ready to begin the hypnosis process, I use simple methods that might include such things as stories, visualization, pretending, heroes and media characters, and other imaginary tools, often based upon the child's interests as revealed in the opening session.

I have all kinds of magic boxes that hold special things to help the child with their changes- magic stars that glow in the dark to serve as reminders; magic wands that can change a situation; magic candy that when eaten makes one feel better; magic rings that when worn make one feel more confident; a magic hat with which to think more clearly; and magic glasses through which to see more clearly.

When the session is over, I spend a few minutes with the parents to give them a brief overview of the session, without revealing anything the child has told me. Being left "out of the loop" can often develop distrust of the therapist by the parents. Sharing with them, even though in generalization, keeps the parents "on my side," as well as assures them that I am professional in my approach to the child-very necessary, in these days.

I use that time to make suggestions to the parent(s) which will support the work the child is doing for herself. Also, It is the time for encouraging some counseling or other guidance for the parents, if the therapist suspects that the parents (or other close relations) are causing or exacerbating the situation, or otherwise hampering the child's progress. This is the truly "touchy" area of working with children, I feel.

Working with children is a wonderful specialty. Hypnosis, and other altered-state methods, is a wonderful tool to strengthen a child's confidence in using their natural gifts and talents, and to feel empowered in a world where they often feel they are victims to adults and their larger circumstances. The hypnotherapist merely serves as a guide, leading the child into those already present gifts and talents.

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