

## ***Pediatric and Adolescent Hypnotherapy***

In 1955 the British Medical Association recognized hypnotherapy as an important therapy and approved its use. This was followed in 1958 by the American Medical Association doing the same thing. Yet, here in the Twenty-First Century hypnotherapy is not widely employed by the mainstream medical and psychology communities. Since hypnotherapy has been proven to be a very powerful tool in the solving of many problems and ailments one would logically ask the question: “*Why has hypnotherapy been largely ignored?*”

The answer to that question lies primarily in the fact that the practice of medicine in the Western World is very political. Any treatment or procedure, which does not meet with the approval of the major drug manufacturers and which contributes to their profit structures is relegated to a non-existent status. Hypnosis and hypnotherapy fall into this category. Therefore, hypnotherapy is not widely taught in medical schools and is largely misunderstood.

### **Hypnotherapy Defined and Explained**

Hypnotherapy may be defined as the use of hypnosis or the hypnotic state for therapeutic purposes. Hypnotherapy is the focused use of the trance state in order to reprogram self-limiting unconscious patterns. It is the state in which openness to learning is most likely to occur.

All of us have experienced hypnosis. Several times a day we enter a self-induced trance state. This is a part of the natural activity-relaxation rhythm of the body known as the ultradian rhythm. We conventionally experience this as “*spacing out.*” In addition everyone passes through a state very similar to hypnosis when going to sleep and again when waking up.

As the study of hypnotherapy has progressed we have learned that the unconscious cannot be commanded into a state of well-being. The old authoritative hypnotist approach, “*When you look at that ashtray, you will stop smoking,*” has been replaced by a more sophisticated and successful method, pioneered by Milton Erickson, M.D. (1902-1980).

**Erickson** reasoned that the unconscious is not an evil force trying to thwart our best intentions. Instead, each individual has all the resources necessary for change already residing within. The hypnotherapist helps the client awaken these latent potentials. He/She conveys options to the client which were formerly unperceived.

In order to do this, the hypnotherapist uses a variety of techniques. The therapist may dialogue with the unconscious, tell anecdotes and metaphors, stimulate memory recall, utilize age regression, help the client recall, reinterpret, or re-parent an original childhood trauma, or even assist in altering the original birth experience.

### **Problems Treatable With Hypnotherapy**

Although hypnosis is commonly associated with habit cessation (losing weight, quitting smoking, etc.), almost any area, which responds to conventional therapies can be treated more effectively with hypnosis.

The well-trained clinician using hypnotherapy can help clients suffering from: **depression • anxiety • grief • low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence • stress • insomnia • substance abuse • fears and phobias • memory loss • panic attacks • certain types of learning disabilities and more.** Even forms of **schizophrenia** and **multiple personality disorders** have been cured through hypnosis.

The medical applications range from **pain control** and **anesthesia** to the more generalized use of **stimulating the overall healing process.** Patients respond much better to surgery when placed in a hypnotic trance prior to the surgery.

## What Hypnotherapy Can Do For Children

One of the most frequent reasons children are brought to hypnotherapists is for **learning improvement**. When it comes to school life, there are many problems children can develop. This may be one of the largest areas of concerns for parents. Such arenas as reading, writing, memory, getting homework done, grades, peer pressure and friendships, classroom deportment, self-esteem, and even wanting to be in school are effectively and easily handled, for the most part, by one or two hypnosis sessions.

Issues, for which hypnotic methods and tools are a helpful response, include: **performing better in the classroom • doing homework • improving test scores • getting to school on time • actually liking school • improving grades • friendlessness • thumb sucking • lying • cheating • bedwetting • nightmares and fear of the dark • stealing • low self-esteem • bad attitude • dealing with divorce or death in a family • smoking cessation • illness - their own or someone in the family • and a myriad of other problems.**

Hypnosis works well with children because there are fewer years of reinforcement of imprints on the mind. Children are more susceptible to hypnosis. They have the drive to discover and they hunger for new experiences. They're open to new learnings, willing to receive and respond to new ideas, as long as they are presented in an understandable way.

Children are usually easily relaxed and focused. They have an ability to change and to be versatile, and, before the age of twelve, to accept most ideas uncritically. They aren't as dominated by rational questioning and concerns that adults have formed through their life experiences. Also, they don't have the fears and misconceptions about hypnosis that so many adults have. This makes it relatively easy to work with them.

Hypnosis is a powerful tool in strengthening a child's confidence, helping them to feel empowered, where before they have been *"victim."*

## The Experience Of Being Hypnotized

Many people, who have never experienced it, have the wrong concept of hypnosis. It is not sleep. When hypnotized for the first time a person is not *"out-of-it."* In most cases the subject is fully aware of the hypnotherapist's voice and is able to respond on request. When experiencing hypnosis for the first time is quiet common for a person to be thinking: *"I don't think this is working. I don't think I'm hypnotized. I don't feel anything different"*.

However, each client may experience hypnosis differently relative to the technique being used and the psychology of the client. For some, it is a heightened awareness; for others, a profound relaxation. Sometimes the client hears every word the hypnotist says, and other times the voice fades in and out or becomes completely inaudible. In modern hypnotherapy the client is never put under the *"control"* of the clinician.

Therefore, hypnosis is not an artificial condition imposed upon a "subject," but rather a skill to be learned by the client to correct an existing symptom or problem. It's not magic; all clients must work cooperatively with their therapists. However, when used by a competent and well-trained professional, it is an effective and dynamic therapy.

## Anyone Can Be Hypnotized

But, not everyone can be hypnotized by the same method. There is no such thing as a good subject or a bad subject because everyone has a natural response to hypnosis. True, some people may need a little more work than others to enter a state of trance. Before the first session the hypnotherapist will have each client fill out an application that contains a number of questions. When answered these questions will tell the hypnotherapist how to work with that client in the most effective manner.

## **The Power of the Imagination**

The doorway between the conscious and the unconscious mind is the imagination. For children, it's relatively easy to reach at the deepest levels, in a much quicker time than required by a good many adults. The use of stories, adventures, visualization, imaginative games, role playing, magic, puppets, costumes and any other tools that one's imagination can bring forth are at the hypnotherapist's disposal, and work most effectively with children.

The imagination of children is very keen until parents, teachers and others interfere. When adults consider daydreaming worthless, and associate imagination with lying, when they call attention to its acuteness to others, or otherwise imply ridicule, the child gradually lets it weaken. Also, in many schools, the style of teaching in the classroom can tend to rule out the playful and imaginative, once children pass the second or third grade.

It releases their willingness to use their natural gifts. It elicits talent and creativity. It provides a wonderful foundation in their education. With a good hypnotherapist, children can experience true success in their lives in all areas, feel happier and have a sense of real freedom.

## **While In Hypnosis A Person Will Not Do Anything Against His/Her Will**

Often, people, who have seen hypnosis stage shows or have read certain novels or have seen movies that include hypnosis ask this question: "*Can someone in hypnosis be made to do something against their will?*" **The answer is NO!** In the old John Barrymore movie, *SVENGALI*, a bearded madman, in a very dramatic manner hypnotized women to do his bidding. This is called the *SVENGALI EFFECT* and is **pure fiction**. Even in more recent films and television programs, hypnotized persons are **falsely** depicted as being completely under the control of the hypnotist.

Because of this many people balk at the notion of being hypnotized for fear of allowing someone to take control, make them act foolish or do something that they would later regret.

Contrary to what has been depicted in hypnosis stage shows the hypnotherapist can not "*jump into a person's head*" and make the individual do anything that he or she doesn't really want to do.

Even when deeply hypnotized, any individual, regardless of suggestibility type, will refuse to do anything that is against his/her or ethical principles, religious convictions and/or moral beliefs. People in hypnosis will also refuse to do anything of a harmful nature. There is a protective mechanism located deep in the primitive portion of everyone's subconscious mind that will always reject such suggestions. The client is always free to alter the hypnotic experience or to come out of trance at will.

## **Assuring Successful Sessions With Children**

It seems ridiculously basic, yet, it's important to remember that a child's problems are as important as an adult's. Children need to be treated with as much respect as given to any adult who comes to us. They don't need to be "talked down to." Children may not have as many years; but, just as with adults, imprints are planted in their minds, from the time they begin life, by whatever they've seen and learned from parents, relatives, teachers and peers. Whatever a child has experienced, it has been as strongly received as any complicated thing that's happened in an adult's life. The difference is that children are still bound to whatever their parents wish for them and for themselves.

An effective session deals with the parent's concerns for the child, while honoring the child's desires and needs. Information is gathered, in order to determine how best to approach the child's problem. A sensitive hypnotherapist will have discerned possible questions before they are asked,

in order to clarify how sessions will be conducted, and to clear up any misconceptions about hypnotic processes.

### **Building Rapport With The Parent**

Good rapport must be developed with both parent and child. What makes working with the child unique is not so much their problems, or even the techniques or tools the hypnotherapist may use, but having the parents as a contributing factor. From the first meeting with a child, the hypnotherapist is also dealing with that child's parent(s). Establishing rapport with them is as important as establishing rapport with the child. In one way or another, a parent can support or ruin the work you do. They can be supportive or detrimental to the child.

The child's problem may well be brought about by a parent, or, at the very least, acerbated by them. Keeping the parent feeling that they are part of the process, without violating the child's confidentiality is important.

Explaining some of this to the parent, at the beginning, and speaking to the parent after a session, goes a long way in keeping the communication open, and in justifying the parent's confidence in the process. To keep rapport, the therapists meets back with the parent(s) with any recommendations, including possible "homework" or other support.

### **Locating the Source**

When a child is brought in for any serious issue, it should be assumed that there may be some deeper problem, for which this is just a symptom. In such cases, the hypnotherapist has a number of techniques to find the problem and effectively deal with the primary cause.

### **The Origins Of Children's Problems**

Much that goes on in our world can cause problems to children, just as well as to adults. Rapid physical growth over short periods of time, and concerns about changes in their bodies can cause stress and loss of self-esteem. Various problems in school, with studies, teachers or peers, may be troubling a child.

There are many fears that can plague children: [fear of the potential of danger in our schools today](#), [fear of the dark](#), [fear of going to sleep](#), [fear of doctors, dentists and needles](#), etc.

Many children experience the embarrassment of habits they find hard to break, like bed-wetting or thumb sucking. A new baby or other addition to the family can cause undue stress. Loss of their own bedroom space due to a new addition to the family, or having to move to a smaller place can make children unhappy.

An underlying fear of kidnapping and other abuses may affect our children far more than we realize. It's difficult to keep such news away from a child's hearing, these days.

With children, the world revolves around them, until experience helps expand that world. As they are the "center," then everything is where they are. If there are problems in the family, they take on those as their own. If parents are having trouble in relating well, their children can become fearful and guilty, as if they were the cause or should have prevented it in some way. This is what creates *"ADULT CHILDREN."*

### **School and Learning Influences**

The loss of a friend, who moves away, being shamed or frightened by a teacher or principal, the death or serious illness of a school peer or teacher, boredom with school, having to make new friends, unfamiliarity with schoolwork, as well as falling behind in a subject or being "behind" the other kids, and other comparisons are common problems for many children, and can cause excessive stress.

The insistence upon *"correct"* performance in front of others in a classroom can be extremely hard on a shy child. Someone in school or the neighborhood who threatens or bullies other

children, and the general fear and pressure of drugs and guns are serious concerns and create high stress for children, in many schools.

### **Societal Influences**

The Media - Our modern century provides an enormous spread of negative influences on our children. Television and movies regularly present violence, sex and innuendo as the norm. Shallowness and self-centeredness are projected by sit-coms on TV by unmarried 30 year olds, who are totally wrapped up in themselves. Advertising and acquisition are other primary images, as parents go crazy trying to get the child whatever the child wants.

News events on TV - War and resulting migration of homeless families, famine and other tragedies within countries, kidnappings, abuse and other mayhem against children, and the latest disease or other terrors are projected on the screen, nightly, inundating our children, just as they do adults. And children are just as impacted as their parents by this constant onslaught of negative messaging.

What adults consider important in life - Millionaires seem barely out of diapers. A car at age 16 is a must. Slimness for women and powerful "pecs" for men are major images projected by television, movies and magazines. Fear of retirement, ill health and the desire for youthfulness remind us, "For god's sake, don't get old or your life will be over." Millions are spent every year in keeping us beautiful forever, and in staving off eventual death. Children receive this information by words or inferences from the time they are born, unless they have parents who find ways to help them keep a balanced approach to life and living.

### **Family Influences**

When children are brought to a counselor's office, they come with their parents. And those parents may reflect the other factors that contribute to a child's problem.

Parents often lose sight of the impact of major events or stress in the family upon the children. Often, adults make the mistake of believing that children are resilient. They don't speak to them about difficult situations, yet will speak "around," or in front of them, as if they weren't there or didn't understand, anyway. Many times they don't bother to ask the question of "why," when a child is troubled. Often, parents perceive their children's problems as rather unimportant, in the light of their own difficulties.

Problems children face are dissatisfied parents who can never be pleased, a parent who expects too much, individual family members who are chronic worriers, and negative parents for whom the glass is always half empty. Death in the family, divorce or other important separation, loss of a parent or favorite grandparent, an abusive sibling who teases or shames, arguments between parents, even violence, an addictive parent or step-parent, an older sibling leaving for school without them, violence or sexual abuse toward the children, a depressed, anxious or highly strung parent, a parent or sibling who is physically ill much of the time, and moving away from other members of the family, or friends are other problems many children face. They must be considered when dealing with the child's presenting symptoms.

### **Influence of Peers**

Although possibly more strongly felt once children reach pre-teens, even smaller children are affected by their friend's choices and experiences. Moving to a new school, having to make new friends, handling bullies, unfamiliarity with schoolwork, as well as falling behind in a subject or being "behind" the other kids, and other comparisons, are common problems for many children. Being teased for being the "wrong" height or weight, or for not fitting the status quo embarrasses some children. The struggle to belong and rejection by groups become especially hard on pre-teens and teenagers.

## **How Stress Can Affect Children**

When children are experiencing unrelenting stress or are worried, whether or not they are conscious of it, there are warning signs for those who have the eyes to see. Schoolwork may begin to slide. They may begin to lose things on a consistent basis, steal, become accident-prone, have headaches or stomachaches, bite their nails or pull hair or lashes.

They may return to wetting the bed, after having been dry for some time. Health problems may start cropping up. Other people may notice a dramatic change in disposition. The child may begin to stop wanting to go to school, or begin to cause problems in the classroom. They may lie and have other avoidance patterns. They may turn to drugs or alcohol. They may begin to have trouble sleeping, experience frequent nightmares or sleep walk.