

## **HOW CHILDREN RESPOND TO HYPNOSIS**

Children often are marvelous subjects for hypnosis. Once they have developed to the level where they have an adequate attention span they tend to be easily hypnotizable. This may be due to the fact that much of early childhood is spent in hypnosis. Children play games that include deep involvement, which is a form of hypnosis. They indulge in fantasies and pretend experiences, which are also forms of hypnosis.

Children are additionally benefited by the fact that many inhibitions that commonly affect adults have not yet developed. Since children haven't fully developed also have limited capacities for critical judgment. Trust and positive rapport are essential and bringing out these qualities can be difficult, especially in cases where a child is presented by a feared authority figure. Confidence must be earned, apprehensions must be allayed and communication must be established.

## **APPLICABLE VIZUALIZATIONS**

Why would a child need or benefited from hypnosis? Like the famous answer to the question, "how do I love thee?" let me count the ways! Certainly among important usages must be the early control or elimination of childish habits – bedwetting, nose picking, mannerisms and often attitudes. As children grow older, hypnosis can dramatically affect attention problems, learning enhancement, study procedures, anxieties (whether from home, school or other sources), self-esteem, motivation, athletic performance, creativity, non-understood grief (or loss or separation)- the list is virtually endless.

To a professional it is incredible the amount of psychological damage that can be and is done to children by parents, relatives, siblings, teachers or authority figures. Much of it is well meaning efforts intended to provide direction and motivation, coming from a trusted source that intends no harm. However, children differ (just as adults do); some are introverts, some are extroverts. Some come from homes that offer praise and encouragement, others come from environments where criticism and lack of recognition are considered appropriate. Others come from environments of discord and abuse. Ultimately, regardless of which environment the child comes from, one of the greatest gifts a child can receive is prolonged contact with an individual (whether teacher, parent, older sibling, coach or counselor) who can and will offer sensitivity, understanding and appreciation of value.

Children respond to comments by authority figures in differing ways. A parent or teacher, on viewing a poor report card, might comment: "you are going to be the dumbest kid in the class all your life!" The intent might well be to motivate the child to change this detrimental distinction by trying harder. A self-assured child might respond in that manner. Yet an insecure child might well accept the statement literally as a true prognostication and experience a psychological inner flip which locks in place acceptance of the self as unworthy, incapable and doomed to fulfill the stated destiny. The files of psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists and hypnotists are filled with cases of adult clients who have sought therapy to get out from under self-deprecating childhood imprints imposed by well-meaning (and often not so well-meaning) guardians.

## THE GIFT OF IMAGERY

Young children as well as adults are not usually aware of the complexities of the mind, or of its fantastic array of powers. They do not comprehend that, “what the mind can conceive, the body can achieve.” They do not understand the dramatic capabilities of visualization. Yet they have the child’s natural talent for dreaming- for picturing achievements of childhood ambitions in their minds. It is this characteristic that the Hypnotist can use to surmount the afflicting problems and free children from bonds which restrict them from achieving their potentials.

Children normally are very visual. They respond beautifully to tales, bedtime stories, and related communications with which they can identify. They are quite narcissistic – they like to have a part in a story that is being related and tend to slip into hypnosis easily. Children in the six or seven age range have little difficulty. Those in the four to six range, with shorter attention spans, may respond to induction techniques, which are less formalized, or directive. Pre-school ages may combine the worlds of fantasy and reality. Pre-induction data should focus on gathering information about a child’s likes and dislikes, fears, imagery experience, and social environment- all in a manner in keeping with the child’s communication level and oriented toward building rapport.

Being familiar with and participating in the child’s play therapy may help develop rapport, revealing the child’s interests and imaginative capabilities. Play can be a wonderful vehicle for implementing therapeutic suggestions.

Among older children and adolescents hypnosis has been effective in dealing with behavioral problems and delinquency. Clinicians, regrettably, often turn to hypnosis as a last resort. Experience indicates success is greater when the patient acknowledges distress and has personal motivation to change. The fact remains that hypnosis is virtually impossible in cases where the client does not want to be hypnotized. Successful therapy demands patient consent and cooperation.

Hypnosis for drug abuse, for example, virtually requires that the client be aware of and concerned with the potential for harm and have an expressed desire for change. Therapists must be aware that teenagers with behavior problems may be struggling for autonomy; therapists need to evaluate and understand the extent of the clients motivation for change, and the cognitive, social, emotional and psychosexual development factors which contribute to attitudes and behaviors.

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