

# Hypnosis

**By Susan Lee Bady, CSW, BCD**

Hypnosis is a very important and interesting therapeutic method that arouses much confusion and curiosity in people as to what it is and what it can do. It conjures up images of the magical and the mysterious and is subject to many misconceptions. In truth, however, it is a very versatile and useful tool used in both long and short-term therapy that helps to change behavior and attitudes, facilitate insight, regain repressed memories, lessen pain and generally deepen and speed up the healing process.

The origins of hypnosis go back to ancient religious rituals. It was first used therapeutically by Franz Anton Mesmer, an 18th century Viennese physician, to cure a wide variety of medical and psychosomatic ills, but was not used extensively again until World War 2 when it was found helpful in dealing with pain. In the 1950's after pioneering work by Milton Erickson and others the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association all recognized its usefulness.

Hypnosis is an altered state of awareness involving focused attention, heightened absorption and imagery, openness to suggestion and closer contact with the unconscious. It is a very relaxed and comfortable state of being. Meditation and visual imagery are a part of the range of hypnotic phenomenon though they are not necessary to produce it. Visual imagery, in particular, is often incorporated into hypnotic procedures. Though many people question if they can be hypnotized, it is actually a state we all enter into at times when, for example, we find ourselves daydreaming, in a reverie, or when we realize we have just driven from one place to another without realizing it. Almost everyone, therefore, can be helped to experience it at will and use it to their benefit.

Hypnosis in the therapy situation is based on a close rapport between patient and therapist. The therapist helps the patient to become hypnotized and in this relaxed and soothing state of mind helps him to deal with his issues at hand.

Hypnosis is not sleep, which is a periodic suspension of consciousness. In hypnosis, the individual is always in control of the depth of trance, of when to wake up and how much to remember. Contrary to popular mythology, the hypnotized person will never be forced to do something against his will.

Rather, because of one's greater openness to suggestion and greater access to the unconscious, during trance healing capacities within the individual are released and change is more apt to occur. Hypnosis has proved useful in changing habits such as overeating and smoking. It can help to overcome stage fright, fear of self-assertion, depression and anxiety attacks. It has been very valuable in controlling pain and speeding the recovery process in surgery. It is also very useful in uncovering repressed memories, exploring dreams, helping to resolve dilemmas or make

important decisions because of the ability of hypnosis to help the person gain insight and engage in creative problem-solving.

Our minds are a storehouse of information and possibilities, but as researchers note, we all use far less of our brain potential than is available to us. Therapy works in part because the therapist adds his expertise to that of the patient's and stimulates the person's own ability to change. Hypnosis, with its freeing and facilitating capacities, greatly expands our ability to use ourselves to our fullest potential.

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