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Orientation to Ericksonian Hypnosis

Could you become interested in experimenting with hypnosis? Even words like “hypnosis” and “trance” can cause many different emotional and mental responses. So it is important right from the onset to be clear about what clinical hypnosis is—and what it isn’t. Accurate information and clarity are essential for sound ethical and clinical practice.

Hypnosis is a state of *focused awareness*.

Misconceptions concerning hypnosis arise from myths that have been created by historical factors, the use of hypnosis as stage entertainment (“I can make him squawk like a chicken!”), and by modern portrayals in the media (e.g. *Hypnotic* [2021] on Netflix). These misconceptions include the following:

- At best, hypnosis is like intoxication and I will lose my inhibitions, or
- At worst, hypnosis is pure mind control; thus
- Hypnosis will make me vulnerable to manipulation.
- I may go into a trance and not “wake up.”
- Hypnosis is an expression of the occult, demonic forces, sorcery, and the work of Satan.

You can easily see how these misconceptions can cause emotionally-based prejudices difficult to overcome, robbing us of a valuable resource for the alleviation of human suffering.

In reality, hypnosis has a long history with many types of applications. The Ericksonian perspective, from which I practice, maintains that hypnosis is best understood as *a state of focused awareness* as well as a *form of communication*. In that view, most humans experience trance quite frequently in many different ways. Think, for example about . . .

- A teenager who is so absorbed in Mine Craft that he is unable to hear his mother’s calling him to dinner;
- A Buccaneers fan so captivated by one of Tom Brady’s last minute drives down the field that she’s completely unaware she’s spilling popcorn all over the sofa;
- A classical music enthusiast so riveted by a rendition of Handel’s Messiah that she completely loses a sense of time;

Hypnosis is a form of *communication*.

- An athlete who performs “in the zone” such that he sinks a 40 foot putt, or speed skates a world-record time, or strikes a 98 mph fastball 450 feet, completely oblivious to the crowd.

Trance is a natural capacity of the human brain. And the above examples of focus are daily experiences of trance that, in most cases, are treated as socially “normal” and, in many cases, are sought after—sometimes even without the assistance of chemicals.

In mental health treatment, trance is utilized for clinical purposes because in a slowed state the human mind functions differently than it does during daily tasks and activities. In particular, the creativity, resources and unique perspectives of the unconscious mind are more accessible and available and thus more easily applied to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral difficulties. This “elicitation approach” seeks a partnership with the very best qualities which every client brings to therapy.

What You Can Expect With Hypnosis

Clinical hypnosis practiced from the elicitation perspective includes several key elements you can reliably count on:

- Expect me to proceed at a pace that is right for you as well as to seek your feedback as to what you are experiencing;
- Expect me to encourage you to control your experience, always with options you can freely choose or decline;
- Expect to have all your questions about the process answered to your satisfaction;
- Expect an emphasis on your experiences, sensations, feelings, memories, thoughts “of the moment” and “in the moment”;
- Expect unusual language, all of which is carefully chosen with the goal of helping you focus your attention and become more aware
- Expect a sense of comfort, relaxation, well-being, and peace that you may or may not have experienced previously
- Expect success, because properly approached, there is simply no way to “fail” when one is experimenting with new things;
- Expect to learn much about yourself, your history, your feelings, your insight, your creativity, and your intuition;
- Expect a sense of quiet wonder and delightful confusion as you reconnect with your strengths and resources;
- Expect the enjoyable unexpected! That is, like a gift you give to yourself that is particularly desirable, agreeable, and satisfying

Hypnosis is an experience in which we can explore, discover, remember and create your *psychological resources*.

Usually when a client starts with hypnosis, we will begin with some simple relaxation exercises and perhaps some breathing training. Other beginning tasks include establishing a sense of safety and stability. More advanced work can include resolution of long-term trauma and helping clients rework unhelpful but entrenched relational patterns, including how they see themselves and how they feel about themselves.

As with everything we do in your treatment, if you have questions, please ask. I certainly want you to . . . “feel comfortable” with your experience with me.