

The Five Pillars of Hypnotherapy



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THE FIVE PRIMARY FORMS OF HYPNOTHERAPY

Pillar I. Suggestion-based Hypnotherapy

The first primary form, or practice, of hypnotherapy is that of suggestion. Suggestion therapy is by far the most common, prevalent, and popular form of hypnotherapy. Suggestion therapy is the practice of the therapist using carefully phrased suggestions for therapeutic purposes, while the client is in hypnosis. If you took a poll and asked the general public what hypnotherapy is, the most common response would be an answer, or description, of suggestion therapy (the practice of hypnotherapy that relies, in most cases exclusively, on the use of suggestion). A typical answer is, “It’s where they put you under hypnosis and tell you things like, ‘you no longer overeat’, ‘stress no longer bothers you’, ‘you accept that you get high grades’”. Such a response describes suggestion therapy- which is simply *one form*, or practice, of hypnotherapy.

Suggestion therapy has long been the cornerstone of hypnotherapy. To this day, a good number of hypnotherapists rely solely upon its use. Without going into unnecessary detail, this article will give you the important facts surrounding suggestion therapy as it applies to the practice of hypnotherapy. I will outline the most salient points which you can use to help make your decision about hypnotherapy.

a.) Because most peoples’ understanding of hypnosis is derived from popular culture in the form of film, hypnosis stage shows, and TV docudramas, it is quite easy for people to *assume* that hypnotherapy *is* suggestion therapy. While it’s true that guiding someone into the experience of hypnosis is often facilitated by suggestion (a series of relaxation and focusing suggestions), this does not mean that hypnotherapy is only suggestion therapy.

b.) To make an informed decision about hypnotherapy it will help the reader to make a distinction between hypnosis and hypnotherapy. Simply stated: hypnosis is the tool or vehicle that is used to facilitate and retain relaxation and inner focus.

Hypnotherapy answers the question, “What do we do once you are there (in hypnosis)?”. The induction of hypnosis can be, and often is, based entirely on suggestion. But this does not mean that the therapy is, needs, should, or ought to be entirely suggestion-based as well.

Some hypnotherapists fail to make this incredibly important, and powerful, distinction themselves. They become so concerned about and fixated on the hypnosis, “on getting you there”, that they forget to ask the more important question of “what do I do once you are there?”. Because their own focus is skewed toward the suggestions used to facilitate the induction of hypnosis, they falsely conclude that suggestion must be the only form, or only viable practice, of hypnotherapy. And, it is not. Entering into hypnosis is not therapy. The tool (hypnosis) needs to then be applied in a skillful and knowledgeable manner for a positive outcome to take place.

c.) This form of hypnotherapy views the mind as a machine. It is a rather simplistic approach. The goal of the hypnotherapist is to program your subconscious mind (computer) with properly phrased suggestions (software). The objective is to have the programmed suggestions take hold so that the client will act on them. Suggestion does not address the cause of a problem or issue. It masks the cause. It is similar to putting a band-aid over a bullet wound. Sometimes a band-aid is enough assistance and in such cases the client experiences the results they desire. For many people, though, a band-aid is not enough and the wound needs to be healed.



d.) Suggestion is commonly perceived as the magic wand of hypnosis. Many people believe the power of suggestion to be the easy route to resolving otherwise difficult issues. Hypnotherapy practices are frequently marketed along these lines, especially group hypnosis seminars. While it is true that suggestion can work extremely well in select cases, this is more an exception than the norm. The reader who is exploring the option of hypnotherapy should understand the inherent drawbacks to a suggestion-only course of therapy:

- 1.) Relapse. The central, major downside to suggestion therapy is the likelihood of relapse. While suggestion therapy can illicit positive short-term results, its central weakness lies in its tenuous ability to support positive results over a period of time. The main reason for this is that suggestion does not address the cause. Again, it is likened to placing a band-aid over a bullet hole. Although placing a band-aid over a wound is often better than taking no action at all, it is not the same thing as properly treating the wound (cause).
- 2.) Transference. Assuming the suggestions hold, a client may unexpectedly experience transference. Replacing one negative behavior or habit with another is not uncommon. The transference of emotional patterns may also take place.
- 3.) Limited opportunity for growth. Life’s challenges and problems often serve a purpose; namely, they function as a catalyst to illicit emotional, mental, and spiritual development. Masking the symptoms of a problem using suggestion can block the process of life’s lessons you are here to learn and master. If the consciousness (unconscious) of the individual is structured to master a particular lesson in life, the lesson will simply be presented in another form to the individual. There are no shortcuts.

e.) There is a time and place for the use of suggestion in hypnotherapy. A good hypnotherapist will be able to assess such use on a case by case basis, while keeping your long-term, overall well-being in mind. It can help to work with a hypnotherapist who will apply the value that suggestion therapy has to offer- when and where it can be of benefit. The point to understand is that suggestion is more likely to be overused, if not misused and abused, by many hypnotherapists. The author would be weary if suggestion were the only form of hypnotherapy the therapist offers.

Pillar II.

Visualization & Guided Imagery

The second form of hypnotherapy comprises the use of visualization, guided imagery, and psychoimmunology for purposes of self-development, healing, and positive change. For the remainder of this article, the second form will simply be referred to as “visualization”.

Many people shy away from visualization-based hypnotherapy practices because they doubt their ability to visualize effectively. A false assumption tends to prevail here. A lot of people falsely conclude that if they cannot see vivid, detailed, color images when they close their eyes, then they aren’t good at visualization. However this is not the case. Visualization, in the context of hypnotherapy, meditation, or self-hypnosis, does not mean an ability to “SEE” colors, images, shapes, forms, and visual details. Visualization is more likened to the experience of perceiving or imagining yourself in a particular setting. If you can close your eyes, breath easily, and imagine, pretend, think, or perceive yourself in a relaxing environment, like being on a beautiful beach, then you are in the majority when it comes to “visualization”. You don’t have to see images to experience them. Sometimes the experience is that of yourself simply knowing, sensing, or intuiting, the visualization experience as it unfolds.



The hypnotherapist using visualization in their practice is rewarded by the ease in which incredibly rich and powerful experiences are to be had by their client. It is an easy form of hypnotherapy to conduct, and almost always provides a powerful experience for the client. Visualization is also one of the more creative forms of hypnotherapy as well. A typical session might include: placing the client in a particular setting, then constructing a series of events which lead the client through a time sequence where a positive outcome is perceived and experienced inwardly. Visualization is extremely useful in the areas of performance enhancement, academics, mental skill development, overcoming well-defined fears or phobias, goal achievement, and self-discovery.

It is generally not very difficult to learn how to visualize on your own. However, if you opt for self-visualization you will be required to self-monitor and self-direct the session. You end up being your own guide and experiencer at the same time. Compared to having another person guide the session, self-visualization generally detracts from the depth, emotional intensity, and realness of the experience you would otherwise have if someone else were guiding the session for you. Once you develop the skill, self-visualization does get easier and you will find yourself entering more deeply into the scenes and settings you create.

Pillar III.

Regression

Regression therapy aims at getting to the original cause of a problem, phobia, or issue (the initial sensitizing event), by guiding the client back into the past. Regression therapy may include a form of visualization designed to help the client enter into the past (in their mind). If the purpose of the regression is therapeutic in nature, the session can become highly emotionally charged. Therapeutic regression is demanding work for the hypnotherapist, and is often more demanding of the client. However, when it works, a tremendous emotional catharsis often takes place and the client is suddenly freed from an emotional trauma, hurt, or pain they have been suffering through for decades. The saying, “today is the first day of the rest of your life”, applies here.



Regression therapy takes a greater degree of skill on the part of the hypnotherapist than does visualization or suggestion therapy. If you think regression therapy might be of value to you, it is prudent to invest extra time and care in selecting a qualified hypnotherapist to work with.

In certain cases regression therapy can indeed accomplish more in several sessions than would be gained by years of conventional talk therapy. However, there are some things to know:

a.) Regression therapy tends to work best when there is a single defining cause to a problem or issue. A simple example would be: *While in school you were required to give a speech. Being your first attempt at public speaking, things fail miserably, to the point where you were so nervous you were unable to finish the speech. Extreme embarrassment and self-doubt ensues causing intense fear and anxiety when confronted with the prospect of having to give a speech.* Regression therapy would very likely be of tremendous value in this case.

b.) Deep emotionally-based issues can be challenging to work with using regression therapy. If the pain is deep enough the mind has likely protected the conscious self by blocking out specific memories of the past. When regression therapy is applied, things can get tricky. Sometimes a therapist will “push or force the cause”, and the mind will construct or fabricate false memories. This usually leads to great trouble for both client and therapist- especially if the memories are taken literally, which would most likely be the case for any therapist insensitive enough to “force the cause”.

A highly skilled therapist, when encountering false memories from a client, is likely to dialog with the “memories” in a constructive way- seeing and relating to them as a symbolic representation the mind has presented which holds the key to integration, or which reveals by association, the emotional equivalent of the material the client is working through.

c.) Another thing to be aware of when considering regression therapy is the potential of getting stuck in a cycle of going back to the cause, of the cause, of the cause. The regressions can take as on endless feedback loop where you resolve one past cause, only to find another cause behind it, with yet another prior cause behind the second. This is more likely to happen when there really isn't a single, defining cause to the client's problem or issue. If the problem to be resolved is more a personality trait or habitually based, the likelihood of “infinite causes” escalates.

d.) Because the demands placed on the client undergoing regression therapy can be so great, some clients simply find regression therapy too painful, difficult, or draining to continue. An unethical therapist might rely on regression therapy to ensure repeat business by maintaining to the client that a cause is always to be found; that it might take them going back to the cause of the cause, but eventually it will be found and everything will be resolved. The author maintains that consciousness is complex to the degree that a “cause” might very well not be found for the conscious mind (consciousness) of the therapist is unable to see it even if the “cause” were revealed.

Fortunately, there are other forms of hypnotherapy that can release emotional pain, hurt, and trauma which do not require the client having to relive painful past experiences in order for the memories to be released.

Pillar IV.

Parts Therapy

This form, or practice, of hypnotherapy can greatly help in the areas of self-discovery, self-development, and inner exploration. Basically, in parts therapy, the client objectifies and dialogs with different parts, sub-personalities, characters, or role models of the psyche. The most popular character in parts therapy has become the “inner child”. This part represents the part of one’s self that desires to lighten up, have fun, enjoy life as it is, let go of complexity and seriousness, play for the sake of play, etc. In parts therapy you would imagine being present with that part of yourself, i.e. your inner child, and conversing with it. Listening to it. Allowing it space to express itself and be known and heard. Healing can come by simply expressing compassion to that part of yourself which tends to be so neglected in day to day adult life. In this sense parts therapy is serving the purpose of integrating a part of the unconscious into the conscious mind- expanding and making room for it in one’s conscious awareness. This process is also referred to as psychosynthesis. It is a component of the individuation process.



When parts therapy is applied to resolving a therapeutic issue there are a couple of things to know. Parts therapy can provide a new source of inner strength to the client to help them get through a difficult time in their life. This form of therapy is adept at giving the client the experience of getting in touch with parts of themselves (aspects of their psyche) that they are likely not consciously aware of- parts that can provide strength, courage, hope, and determination. In this manner parts therapy is beneficial.

However, therapists that rely too heavily on parts therapy can take the process too far. An example of this would be the therapist that uses parts therapy exclusively to resolve a therapeutic issue by adopting the strategy that if he (the therapist) can get all the parts to get along, to come into agreement and alignment, then the issue or problem will be resolved. Under this theory the therapy sessions tend to get very lengthy indeed. Two to three hour sessions, during which time you are in hypnosis, are not too uncommon with a parts therapist. The reason for this is that parts tend to fracture and split

when a resolution is being sought or forced. The therapist works to get one part happy and satisfied, only to find out that another part was effected which must also be dealt with. This can go on and on and on; hour after hour; session after session. To the client, the therapy process can become unbearably long, draining, and drawn out.

Parts therapy can put you in touch with your inner child, the brave warrior in you, the wise woman, the adventurer, the trickster, the judge, etc. There is certainly value in this. When the parts are looked to exclusively for answers, or to resolve a problem or issue, you may very well find there exist so many “parts” of your unconscious self that it might take lifetimes to get all of them to agree. Again, here we see a theory or strategy, that by itself, is ill-equipped to take into account the complexity of consciousness when taken too far.

Pillar V.

Holistic, Inner Healing & Releasement

There exists a primary form, or practice of hypnotherapy, that is geared directly toward inner healing and the releasement of subconscious pressure. While not as common as the four previous forms outlined above, this is usually the most powerful and effective form of the five when it comes to producing authentic, lasting results. Although relatively few in number, there are, nonetheless, a growing number of hypnotherapists receiving specialized training in the techniques involved. The form is called inner healing and releasement therapy.

Inner healing and releasement therapy has major advantages. The most significant advantage is that it addresses the cause of a problem, difficulty, or issue in an extremely gentle and safe, yet very powerful manner. This form is ideal for releasing and resolving subconscious blocks, causes, negative thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and emotions. The important aspect is that once a cause is released and resolved, it is done with. Relapse and transference do not enter into the equation. The change, or transformation, is authentic and genuine because it originates from within yourself. You are not programmed by an outside person. In this form of hypnotherapy, the therapist serves as a knowledgeable and experienced guide who facilitates your inner process of healing, change, transformation, and recovery.



Inner healing and releasement therapy utilizes hypnosis merely as a tool used to create a state of physical, emotional, and mental relaxation. Hypnosis is not used as an end to the means. Hypnosis is not therapy. Nearly all of the work that takes place in the session does so while you remain in a natural, safe, and comfortable state of near total relaxation. There is no reliving of negative experiences, your subconscious mind is not being programmed, parts of the unconscious are not brought into conversation, and you don't even need to focus on visualizing events or situations.

The single greatest challenge when working with this form of hypnotherapy is that it does require a commitment on the part of the client. Inner healing and releasement is process-based. This means that the speed in which desired results are realized may not happen in one or two sessions. There are several reasons for this. The first is that this approach works *with* your unique and individual process. It does not coerce or force change upon a client. It is not uncommon for it to

take one or two sessions to lay the groundwork and foundation for authentic change to occur. Many people are conditioned to believe that if hypnosis doesn't work in the first session then it is not going to work. The general expectation is that if you go to a hypnotherapist, they should give you the results you want in a single session. And most times results are obtained in the first session, however, the change is often times so gentle and deep enough, that the client does not readily see it. They expect to come out of hypnosis an entirely new person. This does not happen. You are not made into somebody else. That is not the goal.

This form has the highest success rate, above 80%, for clients that stay with the program. I would advise anyone considering this approach to think it over first. Going to a session or two in order to 'check it out' will probably do you and the therapist a real disservice. You end up wasting time, energy and money. However, if you are serious about resolving a particular concern, issue, or problem; or, if you desire to create lasting change within yourself and your life, inner healing and releasement therapy is extremely effective. When placed in context, the actual commitment is most times very minor indeed. An average program is five to seven sessions long. The average commitment is a mere five to seven hours of time, and five to seven visits to the hypnotherapist's office. In return, you experience authentic and lasting results for something that has probably defied your best efforts, various traditional therapies, and which you have been dealing or struggling with for years, if not decades.



Inner healing and releasement therapy nearly always incorporates a holistic approach to transformation and life change. The holistic approach encompasses several facets. 1.) It includes the mind, body, and emotions in the therapy process. 2.) It views the client as a whole person- the client's inner and outer lives, and their environment, is seen as interconnected by nature. 3.) The client's past, present, and future are not isolated or separate phenomena; they affect and influence the client's experience of themselves and their life. 4.) A particular issue or problem is held in relation to how it affects and influences other areas of the client's life, and vice versa. 5.) Various forms of hypnotherapy are to be included in the therapy process; when they will bring benefit and value to the overall inner healing and change process. 6.) The therapist consciously works to empower the client; not to have their clients become dependent on them as a guru or the all-knowing therapist. 7.) When positive change and transformation is experienced, the client is encouraged to understand that the results originated from within themselves- not from the therapist. The therapist invites the client to know that the therapist's role was to facilitate and guide the client's own inner process which allowed the client to come to experience the results they originally intended.