

INFORMED CONSENT FOR THE USE OF CLINICAL HYPNOSIS WITH DISSOCIATIVE DISORDERS¹

Before deciding to use clinical hypnosis, it is important that you understand the use of clinical hypnosis in the treatment of dissociative and traumatic disorders. Hypnosis is a valuable tool, but has been the subject of considerable controversy amongst clinicians in the field. For this reason, it is important that you understand some basic issues about hypnosis to be adequately informed.

Hypnosis is an altered state of consciousness which has a number of characteristics. These include a capacity for deep absorption during the hypnotic state with a reduction in the awareness of external events, an alteration in one's perception of reality and a high level of suggestibility, and a suspension of crucial judgment, including the evaluation of information retrieved during the hypnotic state. These characteristics are more prominent in people who have dissociative conditions and, therefore, contaminations of memory and information retrieved in hypnotic states are more prone to occur. All of these features combine to increase the possibility of producing inaccurate, distorted or false memories. The hypnotic state can result in confusion between reality, one's fantasy life, suggestions of demands from a therapist, and the influence of other stimuli occurring in hypnosis that may alter the realistic interpretation of retrieved information.

Research with hypnosis has demonstrated that hypnosis may enhance memory, but also distort or lead to the production of false information that is still perceived as memory. This is due to the nature of hypnosis, the demand quality inherent in some hypnotic suggestions as well as the individual's expectations of what a therapist may want to discover. Further, information may be retrieved in a hypnotic state that is accompanied by high levels of intensity, body sensations and a conviction that the information is accurate, despite evidence that the information was the product of contamination or hypnotic suggestion. On the other hand, hypnosis is capable of enhancing real memory and retrieving real information which has been repressed or forgotten. Individuals in a hypnotic state may not be able to distinguish the difference between information that is accurate and information that is artifact.

Hypnotic studies, however, have not adequately studied the accuracy of hypnotically retrieved dissociated memory for traumatic events. The uncertainty of hypnotic memory retrieval means that information retrieved in hypnosis should be accepted only with caution and a recognition that it may or may not be historically correct. There is no way of knowing whether any information that is retrieved through hypnosis is historically accurate. This can only be done by the independent validation of information that is retrieved. This is true of all memories reported in psychotherapy. These issues are particularly relevant for individuals with dissociative conditions since they are often highly suggestible and therefore, more prone to the complications of hypnosis in which the suspension of critical judgment, suggestibility and the absorption in the experience may allow even greater degrees of distortion.

¹ From: Young, W. & Young, L. (1996). Inpatient treatment of dissociative disorders. In L. Michaelson & W. Ray (Eds.). *Handbook of dissociation: theoretical, empirical & clinical perspectives*. New York: Plenum Press, 499-524.

People with dissociative disorders are still more prone to accepting suggestions whether they are placed in formal hypnosis or not. Dissociative individuals are often in states of autohypnosis or self-induced trance, especially during psychotherapy sessions or periods of stress.

There are other sources of contamination. Subjects retrieving memories in hypnosis may recall information that they have heard from other sources or even of their own fears or fantasies and experience them as though they were memories. One forgets the original sources of the information and subsequently feels as though it originated in oneself, attributing the emerging material to memory. This phenomenon, known as source amnesia is well known in hypnosis and can be very compelling.

Beyond the issue of memory, it is exceedingly important to be aware that in many legal jurisdictions (including California) and in different states, the use of hypnosis may have an impact on litigation. The use of hypnotically refreshed memory, for example, or simply the use of hypnosis, may prevent or disqualify individuals from testifying in legal proceedings. It is important that you be aware of this in the event that you are involved in a legal action, or expect that you might utilize information that you learn in your treatment in a future legal action. Hypnosis may impede or prevent you from testifying. You may want to contact your attorney if the potential for litigation is relevant.

There are other complications that may occur with the use of hypnosis. These include flooding of emotions, the development of flash backs and traumatic imagery, the sudden return of highly charged traumatic memories that can lead to increased disorganization, suicidality and self-destructive or aggressive behaviors. Hypnosis might result in premature emergence of information that you do not feel ready to manage. These problems may occur and produce the same symptoms without using clinical hypnosis.

Hypnosis, on the other hand, has many potential values. It may be used effectively for reducing anxiety, developing internal states of relaxation, or inducing guided imagery which can help during periods of crisis. Hypnosis may also help to gain information which is unavailable because it is contained in dissociated states. It may also be valuable in developing the capacity to have an internal dialogue between, or an awareness of, other internal states.

Hypnosis is not required for your treatment and many people have successfully completed treatment without it. You can utilize traditional forms of psychotherapy, groups, cognitive and behavioral techniques, the use of medications and emotional containment strategies to develop a sense of safety in your treatment.

I have been fully informed about the pitfalls as well as potential advantages of hypnosis. I am also aware that other forms of treatment such as psychotherapy, group therapies, cognitive therapies and other forms of therapy are used very successfully and may reduce some of the risks surrounding memory distortion. I understand and give my consent to the utilization of hypnosis, knowing that I may discontinue it at any time.

Patient's Signature

Date