

## **Merging Modalities: The Benefits of Using Hypnosis with Psychotherapy**

**by: Debbie Papadakis, RP, CHt**

Being a human and having a human experience means facing life events and challenges that trigger complex emotions. As difficult as it can be to accept these hard situations, it is simply part of being human.

As therapists in the field of mental health using psychotherapy and hypnotherapy, we are in a position to help our clients embrace the full experience of living a healthier life while also softening some of the challenges that impact their mental health.

If the past few years have taught us anything, it's that our mental health matters greatly. The COVID-19 pandemic particularly shone a light on the gaps in our mental wellness. Now, possibly more than ever we are seeing a greater number of people experiencing depression, anxiety, sleep issues, relationship issues and elevated stress. People are trying to achieve their goals or reach a state of happiness and peace. However, they continue being held back by negative emotions and a lack of resilience to overcoming these emotions and transforming them to a positive desirable state.

As therapists, it is important to identify the many tools and techniques available to help our clients, and from there choose the most appropriate approach depending on their needs.

Through my many years of experience combining hypnotherapy and psychotherapy, I have found that the most profound and effective way to help clients is by assisting them to get to the root cause of the troubling issue. From there, we can work toward transforming any perceived traumatic situation by deactivating the charges related to the trauma, and thereby healing—the connected painful emotional experiences. This transformation impacts the person positively and this impact creates a ripple effect throughout their whole life.

This is why merging hypnosis with psychotherapy is so profound; we have a better chance of accessing that root cause when we draw from both hypnosis and psychotherapy. The combination of accessing the root cause via hypnosis, and then using psychotherapeutic tools with a client in the hypnotic state provides the opportunity to help the client examine and reframe entirely any trauma in their past. In a successful session wherein the charge of the trauma is minimized, and in some cases gone, by using several therapeutic techniques, the client will feel free of the negative emotions that were connected to the trauma. This transformation will occur on the deepest level, which often means longer lasting results.

*Pulling a dandelion out by its leaves will not make it go away, it is only when its long, deep roots are removed completely will it cease to return.*

Before we go further, let's take a closer look at hypnosis and psychotherapy, and see how they work together to achieve effective results.

## What is Hypnosis?

Hypnosis is a tool for bypassing the conscious mind, allowing access to the subconscious. The subconscious mind is the storehouse of all our hidden memories and emotions, thus being able to communicate with it directly, means we are accessing the core memories or emotions attached to the troubling issue. This contributes to the effectiveness of hypnosis while also generating more desirable results.

The hypnotic state is entirely natural, and everyone experiences it. It has been agreed by many experts in the field that we are in the hypnotic state for as much as 75% of our waking hours. It is the state we are in when we are daydreaming, zoning out watching TV, even when we are driving. How often have you driven somewhere only to arrive with no active memory of how many turns you made? Or a colleague asked you “how busy was the 401 today?”, and you really have to think, did I take 401 today?

Hypnosis has come a long way since the days of being feared and unknown. Modern hypnosis has several highly effective therapeutic applications, including:

- **Hypnotherapy** –using therapeutic tools with hypnosis.
- **Suggestion therapy** – perhaps the most commonly seen form of hypnosis. While in a hypnotic state, direct or indirect suggestions to create desired change (e.g., behaviour change) are easier accepted by the subconscious in a trance state while the conscious, analytical mind is subdued.
- **Regression Therapy** – a powerful tool to help reveal the root cause that underlies the individual’s issues in the hypnotic state to remove the emotional charge from the root cause event. Through this work the therapist can apply psychotherapeutic techniques at the level where the core of the issue began. Often, this is found at the childhood stage.
- **Genealogy Therapy** – using hypnosis to track the ancestral lineage of the issue.
- **Self-Hypnosis** – anyone can learn self-hypnosis as a way of either self-calming/ stress reduction or to boost their potential by giving themselves suggestions.

## What is Psychotherapy?

Generally speaking, psychotherapy is talk-based therapy with the goal of helping people achieve and subsequently maintain a positive mental state. Many therapists believe the nature of the psychotherapeutic relationship is integral to the success of the client. Commonly, psychotherapy is sought by clients who feel adversely affected by thoughts, feelings, moods, and behaviours. When people feel stuck, or want to make a positive change, they will turn to psychotherapy.

As a therapist, when you combine hypnosis with psychotherapy, you can assist your clients in accessing past information that is influencing their present life, whether it is past traumas, emotions and/or feelings. These are all things that are forgotten by the conscious mind and stored at the subconscious level.

Using hypnosis in combination with psychotherapeutic processes allows for rapid, long-lasting, and highly effective outcomes. When your client is in the hypnotic state, and their relationship with you as the therapist is trusting, there is much potential for applying psychotherapeutic tools

like analysis and reframing. Because the client is in the hypnotic state, their responses will come directly from the subconscious.

Again, it is this direct line to the subconscious that makes hypnosis and psychotherapy so effective. By putting the client into a hypnotic state, issues can resolve much faster because the subconscious mind has the information and knowledge of the root cause.

It is not only the direct access to the subconscious mind that makes merging hypnosis with psychotherapy beneficial; it is also the fact that using both modalities abbreviate the time period for healing while also offering longer lasting reduction of symptoms.

[A study<sup>1</sup>](#) done in 2005 found that when hypnosis was used with cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the study found that combining CBT with hypnosis (also known as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Hypnosis) resulted in greater reduction in re-experiencing symptoms at post-treatment than CBT alone.

Hypnosis is a wonderfully helpful modality, as is psychotherapy. However, when we combine them together, each modality becomes even more powerful.

By using hypnosis, we open the door to the subconscious mind, a proven effective ally in resolving conflicts, hidden pain, obstacles, and self-sabotage. With psychotherapeutic tools working directly with the subconscious mind, we can help the individual heal past traumas and reveal the invisible connections between the events and their feelings. Finally, we can help individuals trace the root cause of issues back to the original trauma that are keeping them from moving forward in present-day—and in some cases, even understanding the root cause is enough for transformation.

### **The Effectiveness of Using Hypnosis with Psychotherapy**

Now that we have a sense of what hypnosis and psychotherapy are and how they can be combined, what is it that makes this combination so effective when it comes to helping unravel negative emotions, limiting beliefs and clearing blockages and get back on the path to achieving their potential?

How we respond to the challenges we perceive life presenting is largely informed by our earliest years; what we observed and the decisions we made about the things we were observing. These decisions ultimately inform the way we perceive the experiences we have as adults. Seen through this lens, it's possible every human has had a traumatic experience in their childhood. This is because “trauma” is ultimately a perception the individual had in the moment, and thus defined by that individual. This is important to recognize; regardless of the environment someone grew up in, whether or not it is obvious to the outside world, if the event led to the perception of trauma in the individual's mind, then it will linger as trauma throughout their life unless it is resolved.

For example, one of my adult clients came in seeking help in making more money. They present as a “failure” and feel like they simply cannot succeed. Whenever they have money, a fight ensues and the money drains away rapidly. Consequently, they are chronically broke, or always

missing opportunities to receive or earn more money. No matter what they do, they just cannot bring in more money.

I used regression therapy to access the root cause of this money aversion. Putting the client into the hypnotic state, I guided the client back to the originating event, a memory that still lives in their subconscious mind. The client learned that they had witnessed their mother and father fighting about money when they were about four years old. At the time, in the client's four-year-old mind, the fight was scary. So their four-year-old self made a decision that money equals fighting.

Because of this belief the client made at age four, a belief that was stored in the subconscious mind alongside the feeling of fear, the client was continually sabotaging their abilities to make or receive money. Having money was either going to lead to fighting or summon the feeling of fear for this client.

On the conscious level, the client knows and feels that they want to have money, but the unresolved belief they formed because of the trauma of watching their parents fight holds them back. Trauma, left unhealed, will continue to inform the responses of the adult when they are faced with challenging emotions or life events.

What makes it tricky is that reactions generated by unhealed trauma in the subconscious are just that, driven by the subconscious and thus often illogical or irrational to the conscious mind. Sometimes, a client can talk on the conscious level for months in talk therapy without ever accessing the truth of what's happening on the deeper level. When this happens, hypnosis and psychotherapy together can shorten the length of treatment while still providing profound and long-lasting results.

But getting to the root cause is only part of the value of using hypnosis with psychotherapy. As discussed, in the example above, the client's perception that they are always broke and the projection of the belief that money will cause turmoil (which looks like keeping money away, missing opportunities, etc.), was driven by the emotions and memories that lived in their subconscious mind. Through regression, and applying psychotherapy while in a hypnotic state, we were able to find the root source of why the client was broke.

From there, however, I continued guiding the client, interacting directly with the client's subconscious mind, to do whatever is required to resolve the trauma and subsequently release the emotional charge and power of the belief that was formed. This could be healing of any kind; forgiveness of the parents, or an illumination of the decision the person made in the moment in a way that shines a light on its flaws or shortcomings. It's even possible the scene may be expanded, and the client can see the fight had nothing to do with money at all!

Before bringing the client out of trance, I gave them "post-hypnotic suggestions," basically positive suggestions to reinforce the changes made. Then, post-trance, I continued working with the client to process the experience on the conscious level.

This is why hypnosis—and especially hypnosis with psychotherapy, is a remarkably helpful modality for anyone struggling with their human experience. It is through this access to

memories, beliefs, and other hidden messages that are stored at the subconscious level that our clients can heal on an even deeper and more comprehensive level.

### **What's Best for Your Client?**

As psychotherapists and hypnotherapists, we have no shortage of tools available to help us serve our clients in a way that meets their unique needs. Ultimately, it's up to us to maintain a robust toolkit to help our clients the best way possible.

Here is a brief re-cap of the many different ways to use hypnosis as a clinical tool that are enhanced when merged with psychotherapeutic techniques:

- Direct suggestions for symptom reduction
- Regression: uncovering suppressed emotions with appropriate questioning while in trance
- Access untapped resources/potential
- Used as an adjunct to other forms of therapy, i.e. psychotherapy
- Used to calm the mind and body – relaxation (stress reduction)
- Pain management - childbirth, dentistry, surgery
- Post-hypnotic suggestions to reinforce desired change
- Cognitive restructuring
- Help with behavioural intervention

Attuning to your client will allow you to sense whether they may benefit from a psychotherapeutic approach or if they would benefit from adding hypnosis along with psychotherapy, thereby resolving troubling emotions by getting to the root cause.

By integrating hypnotherapy and psychotherapy, you can help your clients dispel negative emotions, limiting beliefs, fears, phobias, explore hidden potential, connect with their innate self, empower themselves to create positive attitudes and behaviours and make positive, lasting changes.

While to be human may be to live with all the challenges and feelings life presents, both positive and negative, it does not necessarily mean we need to suffer to live well. Helping your clients live the lives they desire starts with helping them improve their mental health so they can fully embrace the entirety of their human experience.

For more information on training, courses and ways to add hypnotherapy to your psychotherapy practice, [visit us here](#).

### **About the Author:**

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Reference:

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<sup>i</sup> Bryant, R.A. Moulds, M.L., Guthrie, R.M., & Nixon, R.D. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. (2005) "The Additive Benefit of Hypnosis and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy in Treating Acute Stress Disorder."