

HYPNOSIS IN STUDY IMPROVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Study behaviour involves a whole complex of behaviours such as sitting, reading, concentrating, remembering and many skills like comprehension. Any treatment by hypnosis needs to be accompanied at the least, by a self-instruction behaviour modification course, in study improvement of all the responses involved in studying.

The program provides the mind with a method to improve studying. This is necessary because the mind can only be motivated to improve using hypnosis when it knows how. Hypnotic suggestions should then focus on these specific behavioural change procedures in the self instruction course.

Study behaviour includes a whole complex of responses, such as: learning to sit at a desk and do only study, to be able to concentrate, to be able to remember things, to be able to plan your studying, and to possess many studying skills like comprehension, essay writing, usage of grammar, interpreting sets of data, drawing graphs and summarizing.

Study improvement means improving all these behaviours and skills. It must also, ultimately mean and indeed lead to, improved exam performance without exam anxiety. How then does hypnosis play a part in affecting study improvement? A major factor that determines change is the person's motivation to study.

Hypnosis is a technique whereby conditioning of the mind and subsequent behaviour change can be established by its use. It can be used to provide the essential motivating force for study improvement.

From research studies, learning theory (Kanfer and Phillips, 1970) and my own practice, I have developed a program of study improvement, and the following shows how hypnosis is used by myself causing study improvement.

Self-responsibility: It almost goes without saying that a person can undergo no behaviour change unless he undertakes responsibility for his own behaviour. Very often students feel they have no control over their own study behaviour. They have continued to fail in finishing assignments and so on and feel very inadequate. The therapist's suggestions need to include — that the student is gaining self-control as he undertakes exercises in the study improvement program, as he continues to do increased amounts of studying. You should point out that the student has already shown self-responsibility by consulting you.

Stimulus control over study: Behaviours are controlled very much by stimuli in our environment (Skinner. 1938) and study is no exception.

Study cannot be done in front of the T.V.; it must be done at a study desk. The therapist must instruct the student to set up a study corner. I once had a male student who always felt like writing poetry at his study desk. I pointed out to him that he had learnt to control his poetry writing very well. He only had to sit down and almost like an automatic response his hand started writing poetry. I explained that he had nothing to control his study behaviour; that he would have to write poetry somewhere else. Suggestions under hypnosis must therefore say that your study desk will control your studying that every time you sit down at your desk your body will swing into action automatically.

Motivation to study: Often students have reasons for studying but they get lost or they feel self-defeat and believe that their original goals are no longer realistic. I have found that it is a very good idea to explore under hypnosis, the motivation of the student. This usually involves three steps:

Exploration of goals: Usually a student has become unclear about his aims. This involves "probing" and finding all the possibilities.

Forcing a decision: This involves getting the student to eliminate some alternatives, or to realise some alternatives are very similar and that a choice is not presently needed, e.g. teaching science or being a scientist.

Increasing motivation: Your suggestions will aim to get the student to "carry" that motivation with him each day. You can suggest that the student will think about the chosen goal, collect pictures related to it, read about others who achieved that goal (modelling behaviour) and so on.

Shaping study behaviour: Getting behind that desk is the start and what is required is to shape up studying, to do larger quantities and be more effective in what is done. Behaviour modification principles (Stewart, 1979) should be explained to the student, particularly that of shaping, of rewarding successful periods of study. Suggestions in the therapy should be such as, each time you complete a segment of study, like reading a chapter of a book, I want you to reward yourself. Before you do have that reward, you will need to ask yourself what you have just read, did you understand it. If the answer is Yes, then that's very good, allow yourself a reward, a piece of chocolate, a biscuit, a 5 minute break or whatever your chosen reward is. Every time you reward yourself, your studying will get better and better

Study skills: Once a student is studying there is still the problem of learning various skills like comprehension, speed reading, language usage, summarizing, data interpretation and others. It is the responsibility of the therapist, I believe, to point this out to the student and to provide him with notes on how to do these things or recommend he take a course on them.

Suggestions then should ask the student to focus on making summaries, etc.

Concentration and memory: I tend to adopt a model of how the mind functions as being a processor. We learn by processing information. One can't simply feed information into the brain and trust that when you want something it will be recalled correctly.

Memory experiments (Postman and Egan, 1949) show that we must constantly ask how this new information relates to that we already know and that one must relearn material from time to time, to remember it well. More importantly the more subjects process information the better it is recalled. Processing can occur by constantly asking oneself questions, by summarizing information and so on. Suggestions in clinical hypnotherapy then should be, for example, you will want to constantly ask questions about what you learn, the more you ask questions and think of answers and the more you find the answers the better you'll remember the material. Also, you'll find the more studying you do, the more the study materials will make sense to you.....you will learn by the use of images.

Controlling Interfering Behaviours: Obviously a student couldn't study all day and night without other desires affecting him. This is a real problem with students. They wish to play sports, go out socially and do all sorts of healthy interfering behaviours. Instruction in setting aside time for these other behaviours is necessary and your suggestions should contain, for example, you will set aside time for your other interests and you will want to keep to this plan, the more you do the better your studying will be it is good to have other interests, to get exercise you will feel so good by fitting these in with your study behaviour.

Exam anxiety: There is no point in improving studying unless one eliminates any exam anxiety. Instruction in exam planning is needed, and being told of the need to go over old exam papers. Exam anxiety is best eliminated using a modified form of systematic desensitization with using hypnosis instead of the relaxation training. The student is asked to visualize situations which cause increasing anxiety levels, from say 6 months away from the exams to those in the exam room. Each time the student visualizes a

scene the therapist asks the student to experience the anxiety felt then, to then breathe in deeply and relax, to let the anxiety feelings fade away. This is the program I have developed. It has a major behaviour modification component. This can be done by getting the student to read chapters from a self-instruction book (Stewart, 1979) and the therapist can check any problems the student has in succeeding sessions. Often this study improvement is run as a course with the book as the main teaching device. The hypnosis component is of vital importance since this is where the main motivation is developed from. The suggestions, however, must be phrased in a "behaviour modification manner", where actual behavioural responses involved in studying are included. It is simply not enough to say things likeyour studying will improve. After all, how does the mind improve studying if it doesn't know how? The hypnotherapist must tell it!

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