

no degree required

Protectionism and vested interest doesn't rule the roost when it comes to self-improvement, though sometimes they try. Renowned hypnosis expert Andrew Newton reports.

A friend has started to put on weight. Already she's up three dress sizes. She's having a hard time with her boyfriend and her whole life seems as if it's falling apart. What should she do? She wants to talk about her problems and I listen. As a friend, of course I do my best. I listen to her. I talk to her. I give her the benefit of my advice. Every atom in my body screams 'move on; don't allow that no-good psychopath ruin your life; most important, comfort eating is not the answer!'

Hold that thought. I'm not a marriage counselor. What am I thinking?

I've often heard it said that free advice is seldom cheap. But the wrong advice can be even more costly.

Even if I try my best, my friend isn't necessarily going to listen. My friend won't be able to move on with her life until she can bring herself to accept the real truth of her situation. She will continue making excuses for



her partner's bad behaviour and continue the downward spiral until she eventually reaches the bottom. Only then will the slow process of recovery begin.

It's part of the human condition that people tend not to listen to or follow good advice. Most of the time they have to learn the hard way, by their own (often painful) experience. A lesson hard learned is a lesson remembered. But what if there was a short cut to this realisation, one based on sound psychological and humanistic principles?

Actually there is and, as an experienced hypnotherapist, I know that the answer has been staring me in the face since my friend first started to talk to me. Moreover, I know that I can fix her damaged emotions and repair her self-esteem in about an hour.

Most people think that Hypnotherapy means sitting in a chair while the therapist tells you that you're feeling sleepy until you end up in some kind of trance. Then,

some time later, you wake up, remembering nothing about what has been said, and walk away from the session cured of whatever it was that ailed you when you walked in.

This is a misconception. At least 90% of hypnotherapy is just plain therapy. Only about 10% of hypnotherapy is hypnosis. The key to good therapy is the ability to listen to the client. More important, the most vital part of therapy is letting the client discover their own solutions to their own problems. In other words, therapy is just like having a chat with your friend, except you're not making the mistake of actually offering advice. Once your friend comes to her own realisation, it's plain sailing from there on.

Simple solutions

There are some astonishingly simple and straightforward



ways to make this happen – you just don't know what they are at the right moment. Just imagine how powerful a solution is going to be if it's reinforced with a quick session of hypnosis. And just imagine how much better your friend will feel if you could accomplish this in 10 minutes.

Surprisingly, some of the easiest things to deal with in hypnotherapy are the most severe traumas. The techniques are just as easy to learn as they are to apply, and results can be super-quick, not to mention spectacular. No form of therapy can ever erase the memory of a tragic or life-changing event, but hypnotherapy can create emotional distance – the client will still remember the incident, but after just one session, it won't hurt any more or perhaps not nearly so much.

Hypnotherapy remains the most popular of all the talking therapies and it still remains the market leader. There is a very good reason for this – hypnotherapy offers the client an opportunity for rapid change, a quick-fix solution to even some of the most complex problems. The best news is that it's easy to learn the principles and techniques needed to be able to do this problem-solving. No smoke and mirrors or mumbo jumbo, no woo-woo 'magic' and no hypnosis.

No hypnosis? Didn't I just say that you could make the solution more powerful if it was rounded off with a 10-minute hypnosis session?

This is because – wait for it – hypnosis doesn't really exist. That's right, you read that correctly – hypnosis doesn't exist. And here's why.

What hypnosis isn't

Most people's experience of hypnosis comes from watching stage hypnosis – the hypnotist weaves his spell over an unsuspecting group of volunteers who then proceed to cluck like chickens and conduct imaginary orchestras. But stage hypnosis is very different from clinical or therapeutic hypnosis. Certainly the subjects performing on the stage have genuinely experienced hypnosis, but after the

hypnosis, there follows a great deal of play-acting and amateur theatrics. Stage-hypnotised subjects are fully aware of what they are doing and some deliberately play up for laughs. All this has given a false impression of what hypnosis is really about.

Therapeutic hypnosis utilises the same process, but there the similarity ends. Hypnotherapy is very different. Its success derives from allowing the client to identify what it is that makes them feel bad and recognise the cause of their anxiety or distress (mindfulness) and to do something about it. It's always the client who decides what is to be done about it and not the therapist. As said earlier, it's an easy ride from there on.

The great French psychologist Emile Coué discovered that giving a client a very simple mantra to repeat six times a day, for instance 'every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better', would very quickly have a profound and positive effect on a client. And that's hypnosis. No trance, no fairy dust, just close your eyes, relax and repeat and reinforce the message.

Some psychologists in South Africa seem to think that only psychologists should be allowed to practice hypnosis. The irony is that extremely few psychologists even understand hypnosis, let alone practice it.

The same was true in America where several states banned the practice of hypnotherapy, although not stage hypnosis, which is, again, ironic. Then, in the 1960s, a group of free-thinkers started NLP (Neuro-Linguistic-Programming) which is in effect – you may have guessed it – hypnosis by another name. They just changed the name and hey presto, before you could say 'one, two, wide awake' everyone was doing it. The existing petty rules and regulations became redundant.

And that is my philosophy. Hypnosis as a stand-alone phenomenon does not exist – and because it does not exist, it cannot be defined. Because it cannot be defined, it cannot be controlled or regulated. Telling someone to relax does not constitute hypnosis, and yet that's all hypnosis is – just pure relaxation.



Then, once you have the person's undivided attention the mind becomes open to positive suggestions that help and encourage the individual to put problems into perspective, retake ownership of their feelings and emotions, and, eventually, their lives. None of the easy, simple mental gymnastics needed for this are practiced by psychologists – all these tools and techniques have been discovered or invented in the last two decades and are available to anyone.

There are literally hundreds (if not thousands) of books, tapes, DVDs and so on dedicated to self-improvement. Almost without exception, they utilise the techniques of hypnosis and teach the reader to do the same. And why not?

Advertisers use the very same subtle techniques

of persuasion and attraction found in hypnosis, as do politicians, and yet I don't hear the psychology elite getting over-excited about that. As a generalisation, psychologists have no real understanding of hypnosis. And hypnosis is something that the vast majority of them will never use.

Anyway, enough said on that. I'm going to teach hypnosis and the hell with it. In fact I'm going to teach it and then tell everyone to do exactly what I do with most of my clients, and that is to take hypnosis and put it over there in the corner. In fact, let's forget about hypnosis altogether and do some creative relaxation – that's much more effective. Problem solved. ☐

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Andrew Newton is principal lecturer at Europe's Premier Hypnotherapy Training School, Hypnoseakademiet, Norway. In the UK he is a regular speaker at student psychology conferences, professional healthcare conferences and frequently shares the platform with top academics such as Professor Richard Wiseman and Dr. Philip Zimbardo. One of the world's foremost experts on hypnosis, Andrew Newton taught Paul McKenna.

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