

11th International Congress
on Ericksonian Approaches
to Hypnosis and Therapy
December 2011

POSTHYPNOTIC SUGGESTIONS

How to Make Them More Effective

Workshop Notes and References

José Cava, Lic Psychologist, MS
Codirector Institute Erickson Madrid

POSTHYPNOTIC SUGGESTIONS

A great deal of research have been devoted in the last decades to the nature (real or simulation? state? physiological correlates?...) and applications of hypnosis. Nowadays hypnosis is very well established as a powerful tool that help to get better results in virtually any therapy, be virtually any major line of psychotherapy or a large number of medical conditions.

However not much attention or research efforts have been directed toward posthypnotic suggestion and its utilization in therapy. In this regard, Dr. Milton Erickson was a pioneer, and much of his experimental and clinical work is still one of the best sources of knowledge and inspiration in this area.

METAPHORES AND DAILY LIFE ACTIVITIES

“The metaphor is probably the most fertile power possessed by man. Its effectiveness can touch the ends of the thaumaturgy and looks like a creation tool which God left forgotten in one of his creatures while shaping it, like the distracted surgeon that left an instrument in the belly of the patient”. (*La deshumanización del arte – The deshumanization of Art*, J. Ortega y Gasset)

Metaphor as a symbolic communication can reach the unconscious and bring out emotions and change in a very effective way. This is very well known to human being from a long time ago. A major part of our socialization and learning the values and beliefs of our culture come from metaphores.

Daily life activities are predictable contingencies that are available to be associated with posthypnotic suggestions and metaphores, providing cues and opportunities to try new patterns of thinking, feeling or doing.

MAKING POSTHYPNOTIC SUGGESTIONS MORE EFFECTIVE

1. Fixing attention and opening a yes set.
2. Utilizing the person's own associations and personality dynamics.
3. Associating the posthypnotic suggestion with current experience.
4. Associating the posthypnotic suggestion with future events.
5. Introducing the posthypnotic suggestion in an associational network.

POSTHYPNOTIC SUGGESTIONS IN THERAPY

- Improving the adherence to treatment (carrying out assigned tasks).
- Ego strengthening.
- Coping with real life situations by making use of the client's own resources.
- Evoking ideas and feelings when appropriate.
- Evoking hypnotic phenomena if and when appropriate (amnesia, dissociation, analgesia,...).
- Evoking questions the person asks him/herself as a posthypnotic suggestion.



Labor pains significantly attenuated by hypnotic suggestion

Excerpt from an article written by D. Santiago Ramon y Cajal in the Catalan Medical Gazette, 3-Dec-1889 (translation into Spanish: J. Cava)

...This lady was next to the birth of her sixth child, I proposed to her to mitigate the pain, she feared exceedingly, and to accelerate as much as possible the work of delivery, by a previous hypnotic suggestion [*i.e. posthypnotic suggestion, NT*], to which she agreed, after she was assured that nothing could undermine her health or interfere with the mechanisms of delivery.

In fact, about ten days before making the delivery, it was suggested to her during hypnotic sleep that she would quickly give birth, the contractions of her womb would be strong and fast, but unlike what usually happens, the pain that would go with it would be very mild and perfectly tolerable, you will - I said to her – be aware of the strongest pains that go with the matrix dilatation and the expulsion of the fetus, but his leniency will be such that you will not be able to differentiate them from the milder ones, called flies or preparatory.

When the date came up, our prophecy was exactly fulfilled. Preparatory pains came up as usual and lasted all the morning, without really affecting to the patient, who went on quietly with her daily tasks. In the afternoon, the dilatation contractions started, getting a great energy and suddenly, forcing the patient to leave what she was doing, not because of the pain but, according to her, because of respiratory distress and pulse increase. Phenomena associated to any great muscular effort. In less than half an hour she had her cervix dilatated, membranes rupture and the delivery came to a happy end, to her greatest surprise who could not believe it had taken place.

....

We thought then (with the necessary reservations made to generalize from only one case), that hypnotism can be helpful during labor, eliminating or greatly diminishing the pain without disturbing the mechanical and vital events that accompany them, as well as it happens under chloroformic sleep. Perhaps the same delivery could happen during sleep, with complete patient unconsciousness, but as we do not know of any case of application of hypnosis for childbirth we had to be cautious and start with the more gentle and harmless intervention possible.

So we preferred post-hypnotic suggestion instead of sleep, and so we were able to maintain during childbirth their physiological conditions and respect the conscious muscular efforts, which are, if not absolutely necessary, part to a great extent of the mechanism of normal delivery.

Example of using posthypnotic suggestions to treat a wart

Case: ZGC04, woman, 42 yo
Problem duration: 8 months
Result: Success (13 days)

Problem: Wart
Treatment Length: one session
Follow-up: N/A



References

“Automaticity in Clinical Psychology”, I. Kirsch, S.J. Lynn. *American Psychologist*, 1999, Jul; 54(7): 504-15.

“*Concerning The Nature and Character Of Posthypnotic Behavior*”, M. Erickson, E. Erickson. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 1941, 24, 95-133.

“*Hypnotherapy*”, M. Erickson, E. Rossi. Irvington Publishers Inc. 1979

“*Hypnotic Realities*”, M. Erickson, E. Rossi. Irvington Publishers Inc., 1976.

“Implementation Intentions and Effective Goal Pursuit”, P. Gollwitzer, V. Brandstätter. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1997, Vol 73, N1, 186-199.

“*The Oxford Handbook of Hypnosis*”, M. Nash, A. Barnier. Oxford University Press. 2008.