



Clear Thinking Issue 131

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3 open-minded ways to help the hypno-sceptic

*How to help your clients get over their own doubts – by **Mark Tyrrell***

“The easiest way is to not understand and call it a fake. That's an avoidance of understanding.”

Milton H Erickson, Psychiatrist and Hypnotherapist

People often take pride in their scepticism, as if being sceptical itself conferred some kind of badge of achievement. But, of course, it's nothing to be particularly proud of unless it's informed by knowledge, research and experience.

Without those things, scepticism may be no more than a cover for fear of the new, the unknown, or the poorly understood.

At one time or another, highly intelligent people have been 'sceptical' that the earth is round, that it is essential for midwives to wash their hands, that space travel is possible, or that there is such a thing as a black swan.(1)

Why so sceptical?

Scepticism can sometimes be little more than dearth of related experience, or a construct of social conditioning.

'Right-minded' people may have been persuaded into adopting a sceptical mindset around hypnosis because they've heard that *other* people are sceptical about it.

And who can blame them?

For centuries hypnosis was regarded as a 'dark art', or just 'mystical mumbo-jumbo', and its long scientific, as well as anecdotal, pedigree may not be enough to dislodge the sceptical mindset.

Fortunately, we are not in the business of trying to get our clients to 'believe' or 'disbelieve' in the 'power of hypnosis'. We are in the business of helping them get over their problems.

If *they* feel that their scepticism is getting in the way, then we can help to redefine it for them so that it becomes less of an issue.

Here's three tips to help them on their way.

1) Acknowledge the scepticism and reframe hypnosis

If a client has expressly explained their feelings about their sceptical attitude, it's unwise to ignore it and try to act 'as if' the scepticism isn't there. We need to respect their take on things.

So we might say something along these lines:

Yes, you are quite sceptical about hypnosis, and that is a good thing, as a part of you knows that dreams exist, because you yourself have dreamed dreams while sleeping, and a part of you knows that different states of mind exist, because you yourself are sometimes tense and sometimes more relaxed. You also know that relaxation and rest are real, and that things that used to be a problem for you can stop causing you so much difficulty when you make certain changes inside. You know that sometimes time seems to pass very slowly and sometimes very quickly. You know that you can focus so intently on a TV program or a book that you almost forget your surroundings for a while. You know that 'hypnosis' is just a word whose meaning contains all the things I've just mentioned which you know to be true...

These statements *acknowledge* and *accept* the scepticism while gently dissecting the idea of hypnosis into parts of experience they can more readily related to and accept.

You might also 'normalise' hypnosis by describing some of the everyday trance experiences we all have, such as when we drive somewhere and arrive with amnesia for the journey, or when we day dream, and so on.

2) Explain why scepticism doesn't matter

Scepticism doesn't have to be an issue. In my experience, the most sceptical are often the most easily helped - after which they may become, such is human nature, 'hypno-converts'!

We might say something like:

You know, a person who'd never seen a car could be sceptical that such a thing could possibly work - but still be perfectly able to sit in one and be taken someplace it's really good for them to be...

If you show your confidence that scepticism isn't a big issue, they too can start to relax about it.

3) Encourage the scepticism

*"Scepticism is a wonderful tool as long as **you** use **it** rather than letting **it** use **you**."*

When someone is trying *not* to be sceptical, their scepticism may be acting like a compulsion. But if you are seen to *encourage* this compulsion, it may well start to feel much less compulsive.

I might explain how they *"should keep the scepticism"* and that there are many things they should be sceptical about, such as the *"desirability of keeping that poisonous smoking habit"* or *"continuing to be pushed around by that co-worker..."*

I might go on about scepticism so much that eventually a part of them gets somewhat fed up with the whole idea. This is one way to 'wear out' scepticism. I sometimes even ask them to *"be sceptical as they go into hypnosis"* and to *"be sceptical about everything I say"* (which may be rather hard if I am repeating back to them what they have previously said to me).

The important thing is not to be sceptical about scepticism, because when you really start to explore ideas of 'hypnosis' with your client, the whole issue of 'real' or 'not real' pretty soon disappears, like a mirage in the desert vanishing the closer you get.

Note

(1) See: *The Black Swan: The impact of the highly improbable* by Nassim Taleb (Penguin, 2011)

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Mark Tyrrell

Co-Founder

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