

# **Hypnosis Questions & Answers** from the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis

**Q:** What is hypnosis?

**A:** According to American Psychological Association, Division 30 (Society of Clinical Hypnosis) hypnosis is defined as:

“A state of consciousness involving focused attention and reduced peripheral awareness characterized by an enhanced capacity for response to suggestion.” (2015).

Some maintain that hypnosis is not really a state of consciousness, but involves a set of skills and interventions that a trained clinician uses to elicit trance for therapeutic purposes. Trance is a natural human phenomenon that everyone experiences. For instance, daydreaming, being absorbed in a movie that seems life-like, getting lost in an engaging novel, or perceiving time fly by or crawl at a snail’s pace, all involve trance phenomenon. Hypnosis interventions intentionally elicit trance experiences for productive and therapeutic purposes for treating both medical and mental health disorders as well as enhancing performance (e.g., athletes, public speakers, performing artist).

**Q:** Is there a difference between hypnosis and trance?

**A:** Many licensed clinical professionals who employ hypnosis in their practice maintain that these two terms are synonymous. In essence for them, hypnosis is trance, and trance is hypnosis. As

noted above, there are others who distinguish between the two terms and identify hypnosis as a set of procedures, interventions, or a set of skills that promote the facilitation of trance for therapeutic purposes. Trance is a natural human experience that occurs for most people during most of their “waking” day, and can be evidenced by daydreaming, getting lost in thought, being absorbed in a movie, music, or a conversation, or forgetting what you were about to do as you entered a room. Trance facilitated through hypnosis promotes access to the unconscious mind and its vast resources of knowledge, skills, and abilities within a person that may be challenging to access during more conscious states of mind. Trance also involves a suspension of critical thinking and judgment (typically associated with the conscious mind) permitting a greater sense of openness to suggestions offered by the clinician (aka hetero-hypnosis) or by the individual on their own (aka self-hypnosis).

**Q:** Can everyone be hypnotized?

**A:** Everyone, including young children (and most animals) naturally experience trance during their “waking” day. Consequently, most people can benefit from hypnosis. Like most human traits and abilities, some people are naturally gifted when it comes to hypnosis and can be quantified as more hypnotizable. These individuals possess talents and abilities that allow them to go into trance more readily and perhaps more deeply than others. Some individuals are generally considered to be poor candidates for hypnosis, and include individuals with histories of intellectual disorders, dementia, and psychosis since they lack the capacity to focus their attention in ways that facilitate therapeutic trance.

**Q:** Can someone be hypnotized against his or her will?

**A:** No. Hypnosis requires the consent and willingness of another to promote and facilitate trance for therapeutic purposes. This myth, and many other myths, have unfortunately been perpetuated by mainstream media, silver screen productions, children's cartoons, and sensational stage hypnosis productions.

**Q:** Is stage hypnosis real?

**A:** Stage hypnotists are certainly capable of enhancing and facilitating trance experiences in their volunteers. Here's how they do that: First they request volunteers from the audience (providing a ripe selection of people who are willing to "expose" themselves in front of a group of strangers). Then they introduce the concept of "inductions" and "suggestions" to this selective group of volunteers. A series of suggestions are offered ranging from simple physical suggestions ("your arms are getting heavy as they hold this bucket of water") to more a more complex experience involving visual hallucinations ("the audience is sitting in their underwear"). If volunteers fail to respond to a suggestion they are informed that when they are "touched on their shoulder they will then find their way back to their seat." Essentially, stage hypnotists guarantee a selection of highly hypnotizable people (perhaps 2-4 remain on stage) that respond to more complicated suggestions.

**Q:** Do weak-minded people make better subjects for hypnosis?

**A:** No. "weak-mindedness" has nothing to do with the ability to benefit from hypnosis. In fact, therapeutic benefits of hypnosis are typically appreciated by people who are mentally stable despite presenting psychological and/or medical challenges.

**Q:** What is self-hypnosis?

**A:** Self-hypnosis involves the independent facilitation and promotion of trance. Many clinicians encourage their patients and clients to use self-hypnosis as it promotes a sense of independence, confidence, and practice that allows hypnosis to be more effective for meeting treatment goals. Some clinicians provide their patients with audio- recordings of each session that include suggestions for using self-hypnosis.

**Q:** What will I remember, if anything, after hypnosis?

**A:** Anything and everything that is necessary for your conscious mind to recall. It is a misnomer that recalling portions of a hypnosis session indicate that hypnosis was ineffective. Most people recall many things after hypnosis is terminated. At times, however, it may be helpful for a clinician to suggest that someone not remember an experience during hypnosis as it may be traumatic and difficult for them to manage, though this is the exception and not the rule for hypnosis.

**Q:** Will I be asleep?

**A:** Hypnosis generally involves a state of relaxation and physical comfort that facilitates a trance state that is not intended to promote sleep. In fact, during trance, part of the mind can remain very active and absorbed. Most people recall many details of their experience during trance while appreciating that they were not fully alert or sound asleep.

**Q:** Will I reveal any personal secrets during hypnosis?

**A:** Hypnosis is not a truth serum. You will retain full control over what you say. Individuals in trance reveal no secrets that they would not otherwise reveal in a waking state.

**Q:** What are some benefits of hypnosis?

**A:** There are many benefits that can be appreciated with hypnosis including, but not limited to the following: pain management, control of unwanted habits, depression, improved athletic performance, healthier sleep, improved energy, resolution of various skin conditions including warts and psoriasis, enuresis, phobias, digestive disorders including Irritable Bowel Syndrome, and hot flashes.

**Q:** How can I find a qualified professional who uses hypnosis?

**A:** There are several organizations and individuals who advertise themselves as competent, qualified, and even certified hypnotherapists. Unfortunately, there are few, if any, state laws regulating the practice of hypnosis. The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis and the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis provide certification for licensed medical and mental health professionals that requires at least 40 hours of continuing education in hypnosis, 20 hours of individual consultation with an Approved Consultant through the association, and a minimum of two years of experience using clinical hypnosis in their practice. Websites for both organizations maintain an active listing of certified clinicians.