

## **PRESENTING PROBLEM AND STRATEGY SELECTION**

by Frank D. Young Ph.D., R. Psych.1[1]

Most clients who come for hypnotherapy present with problems that usually involve too much negative affect (anxiety, pain), motivational problems, or habit or impulse control. Some wish to explore their inner meaning by recovering memories, regressing into previous experiences, or even past lives. The hypnotherapist needs to assess the category of presenting problem, the main general strategies appropriate to the problem, and finally the specific techniques that are most likely to work with that specific client.

**Overstimulation Problems (anxiety, depression, pain, sleep disorders, etc.)**. For anxiety and depression, Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) is the treatment of choice in helping the client reduce negative affect and correct negative self-statements and cognitive distortions. CBT can be augmented by a solution-focused and narrative approaches in which positive functioning is enhanced, thus crowding out or diminishing the scope of the problem's influence in the client's life. Hypnotic techniques within a CBT framework could include relaxation, desensitization, guided imagery, and ego-strengthening.

**Understimulation Problems (motivational difficulties, identity disorders, etc.)**. Most of these problems respond well to a narrative approach of co-constructed realities projecting into the future. Possibility language, solution-talk, reflective circular questioning can be pursued in ordinary states of consciousness, and also can be promoted in trances featuring focused attraction towards specific future scenarios devised in the catalytic collaboration of the therapeutic alliance.

**Habit or Impulse Management (compulsive behavior, nail-biting, smoking, etc.)**. This category is complex because clients are often compelled to actions that are ultimately self-destructive, but temporarily tempting. Systemic factors need to be addressed, as often the client's social or meaning context may influence the habit or compulsion. Careful motivational assessment and preparation by restraint and challenge are crucial. Go slow and be sure. Techniques can include classical conditioning of positive and negative associations moved

---

1[1] Frank D. Young Ph.D., R. Psych. 935 Eastwicke Cres. Comox, BC V9M 1B2

forward into current and future scenes, especially in stress inoculation and relapse prevention phases.

**Personal Exploration by Hypnotic Regression.** These situations are often complex, in which a client may be seeking a reason or underlying emotional cause of their problem. Often their motivation can be seeking a scapegoat or justification for pattern continuance, rather than resolving the problem itself. Contract very carefully to limit client expectations. Follow non-leading guidelines very strictly. Refer the case on for treatment by advanced hypnotists only.

---