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Hypnosis may help anxious teens



Self hypnosis could be useful in aiding treatment for children suffering from anxiety, research has suggested.

A small study found that hypnotherapy helped psychological treatment in reducing anxiety and feelings of helplessness in students.

The effects of hypnotherapy were found to be greater than those of more traditional relaxation techniques.

The research, conducted at Hampshire Hypnotherapy Centre, was revealed to the British Psychological Society.

David Byron, a senior specialist educational psychologist for Hampshire County Council studied 10 pupils, aged 11 to 16, being treated at the centre for emotional behavioural difficulties related to anxiety.

The students received psychological treatment in sessions with their parents during which they set things they wanted to change about their lives. They were then taught how to self-hypnotise and work towards these targets.

Mr Byron said the hypnotherapy acted as a useful vehicle for the psychological treatment, and he found it produced greater effects than were seen in students using more traditional relaxation techniques.

He said hypnotherapy could be used to influence the treatment process and could be used by psychologists as "an adjunct" to their professional training.

He said: "It seems to empower the students to change their lives and it's not me doing it, it's them."

Mr Byron said hypnotherapy could also be useful to help with a number of other treatments, and that he would like to see the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services nationwide employing people to offer a hypnotherapy service to patients.

He said: "There is no doubt it has a tremendous amount to offer."

Anxiety common

Ian Goodyer, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge said anxiety is a significant problem in children aged 11-15. He said:

"Children may have symptoms such as panic attacks, they may show avoidance behaviours, or they may have sensitivity and worry about what other people may be thinking about them."

He said standard treatments included educating them about their anxiety, and methods such as cognitive behavioural therapy.

He said hypnotherapy had been used widely as a relaxation technique to reduce anxiety, and the idea that it could aid other psychological treatments was "interesting", but he called for more research into the area.

He said: "It is an interesting thought that now requires proper randomised controlled trials."

Interestingly, in this trial the students' teachers said they had seen more changes in the students using the relaxation techniques. But Mr Byron speculated this may be because the hypnotherapy produced cognitive and emotional changes.

He said: "I think there was a direct contrast between the pupils and parents' observations with those of the teachers because the teachers have less time to become aware of the changes going on inside the pupils' minds, especially in the teenage years."

The results of this research into the Hypnotherapy Centre were revealed at The British Psychological Society's Division of Educational and Child Psychology annual conference in Glasgow.