

Hypnotic Principles and Sequences

Attitude from first contact with client (“How can I help you?”) is one of comfort, confidence, positive expectation, authority-within-collaboration, curiosity, acceptance, friendliness, protectiveness, openness, honesty, directness, gentleness: all modeling how to be with yourself, others, and with difficult experiences.

Pacing – Mirroring – Matching. This happens naturally when you relax and join with your client. When it doesn’t happen spontaneously, you can consciously attend to tuning in to the client’s posture, body language, breathing, voice tone, attitude, demeanor, and let yourself align yourself with the elements you can. Too much focus on this risks losing your integrity, even appearing insincere or fake. Maintain the connection with the client and your own sense of identity and integrity preferential to any technical aspect of hypnosis. In hypnotic language, developing a “yes-set” is often achieved with open-ended, vague truisms like “on your way here, you had certain feelings and expectations about what might happen...” Matching can be achieved by describing the current state of distress: “You have been suffering a while...you may be even feeling hopeless about the prospects for improvement...it seems like nothing has worked like you’d hoped...”

Leading. The shift into leading should be subtle and seamless. It has been said that Milton Erickson always spoke to clients as if they were resisting trance. The question you can hold: how now to invite the client into trance? Lead them inward. “You *may* feel more comfortable...you *can* feel more comfortable...you *will* feel more comfortable...you *are* feeling more comfortable.”

Following. Noticing, accepting, utilizing client’s response. “That’s right...that’s a very good place to start from...you can really appreciate your need to resist relaxing too much too fast, that vigilance is your unconscious working hard to keep you safe...”

Successive approximation. Practice makes progress. Notice small changes. Even movement backwards or apparent failures are instructive, part of the learning process.

Reframe. More than a merely cognitive technique, try and really sense the goodness of the symptom. What energy is trying to express itself? What is waking up in the client? Authentic sensing is powerful, while clients will often resist a shallow “look at the bright side” approach as unempathic and even as evidence you can’t tolerate their suffering. Here you are teaching curiosity and flexibility, a delicate balance with matching and empathy.

Flexibility and Creativity. If at first you don’t succeed, try again, but after a while change your approach!

Voice. Modulation, volume, speed, quality of voice are all non-verbal messages about comfort, safety, confidence, and connection with and attitude toward the client. They are inductions themselves, invitations to deepen trance or return to normal waking life.

