

**Integrative Hypnosis
for Kids and Teens**
Playing for Change

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**This is an excerpt from the book by
Kelley T. Woods and Melissa Tiers.**

**It has been made available for this
HPTI course.**

It only contains Four selected chapters.

To purchase the full book, please visit:

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We want to thank all of the kids in our lives.
They continue to be our greatest teachers.

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Chapter 1 In the Beginning

“How do you know where to start?” “What do you say?” “What scripts do you use?”

These are usually the first in a long list of questions we hear from fellow practitioners who often seem terrified of the first encounter with a kid. They want a step-by-step plan, a perfect script or a standard protocol to stave off any imagined awkwardness. Hang out with enough children and you quickly realize, there are no “standard” kids. They are as individual and complex as any adult, but much easier to help. After all, kids don't have forty years of crap to wade through and they haven't had years of learning that change is difficult.

We want to give you more ways to help kids than you will ever need. This book will show you how to creatively interact, play, teach and help kids with just about any issue that might show up in your office. You will learn the art of flexibility so you flow with the child in front of you (as opposed to the child you thought was coming in). We will make this fun for you so that you open up your practice to the people that need you the most. Every child you help is a life changed for decades to come.

How many times have you sat in session with an adult who had been traumatized as a child? After countless sessions of inner child work and helping clients overcome years and years of ingrained habits and beliefs, we both jumped at the opportunity to help kids. Change is easiest to achieve *before* problems are practiced enough to become lifelong patterns. We promise you that working with children and teens can feel like play and yet have the greatest impact you can imagine.

Think about this: kids are powerless over some of the most basic aspects of their life. What they can and can't do, eat, or say are just

some of the rights we adults take for granted. Research indicates that chronic stress, and the various illnesses that accompany it, is directly related to how much control a person has over their day-to-day situations. When agency is taken away, even the brain changes to reflect that.

Empowering kids is what we do. It's what we hope to help you to do. Granting a little bit of power goes a really long way with young people. It teaches them that even though they can't control a lot in their lives, they can control how they feel in any given situation. This has the potential to change everything.

We believe that this lack of control contributes to one of most common reasons kids come to see us. Anxiety shows up in almost all childhood issues. It's a direct response to the need for certainty in an unpredictable world. So much of what we do, with our grownup clients as well, is help make friends with uncertainty.

The most powerful changes come from within. Our job is to create a space where that can happen naturally. It's so much easier than you think! We will share many different ways to inspire kids to find their own solutions. Trust us, this is gonna be fun!

First Contact

As a general rule we like to get a bit of history from the parent before the session. This way we can decide if hearing the kid talk about the problem is the best way to start or if connecting with the child by talking about puppies is the way to go. A parent will also appreciate that you care and want to know the details about their child, a facet that is often missed in more clinical experiences.

If a parent is actually taking the trouble to bring their child to you *and* pay for your services, chances are that they may also be open to being part of the solution, so take advantage of that! We have a whole chapter on playing with the parents which covers what to do when the parent is clearly the problem.

We like to think of hypnosis as being an integrative modality, so that means thinking of yourself as being part of a team, whenever possible, that's there to help a child. This team can include parents, siblings and other caregivers, medical health professionals, clergy, teachers, instructors and coaches. This can also promote a healthy referral trade for you.

Just like adults, children have the right to confidentiality – be sure to tell them (and their parents) that. The exception to this is if the child shares information of being abused or is in danger of harming themselves or others. We suggest compiling a list of resources so that you know who to contact if you are faced with those situations.

A parent may want to know how to present you and your work to their child. The answer can be as varied as the kids we see. For most, ages 7 and up, we find “hypnotist” to hold the most curiosity, expectation and magic but some kids might feel safer with Mental Coach or Brain Trainer. Suggest whatever title is going to pave the way for a curious first meeting.

First Meeting

A basic need of people at any age is a sense of safety and security. This is one of the first challenges to meet when a child comes into your orbit, whether on a personal or professional level. You need to do everything possible to make the child feel safe...without it being obvious that is what you are striving for!

How do we accomplish this? We can start with offering a reassuring environment. Many practitioners try to be kid friendly by having a lot of busy, bright colors. Unfortunately, for many kids, this can have a taxing effect on the nervous system. Too many toys will turn off the teens so we recommend having age appropriate props in a drawer or chest that you can take out to fit the kid.

One vital approach to making a child feel safe involves how you greet them and their parents/caregivers. For most kids, an informal welcome is preferred but there is something very compelling when an adult moves physically to eye level with a child. Follow the child's cues: if they make eye contact and smile back, you can offer your hand in greeting. If they avert their gaze or pull back, let that go.

You can even do a quick pattern interrupt by clapping your hands together with a laugh and saying, “*Hey, I’m so glad that you are here!*”

The primary objective is to let the child feel that they are the most important person in the room. You can elicit that belief by focusing your attention toward the child, even when a parent is talking. This will afford you the opportunity to observe the child’s reactions (or non-reactions) to the conversation. Kids are expert at hiding their thoughts when it comes to such situations – especially those who have endured numerous encounters with health care providers. Paying attention to the more subtle reactions like self-soothing motions, twitches and body language of protection can tell you a lot about what the kid needs.

We get lots of questions about parents. Do we let them stay in the room? Do we share what we learn? What if they are the problem? And as with most things, we answer with, “*It depends.*”

If the kid will feel more comfortable with Mom in the room than that's what we do. We will usually leave it open by saying, “*Sometimes we start with Mom in the room and only when you feel comfortable will we ask her to wait out on the couch.*” We may, after listening to Mom answer all the questions, ask the child, “*So, now that you know I won't bite, let's have Mommy wait out there. Okay?*” If the kid seems upset or fearful we can say, “*...unless you'd rather she stayed for a few more minutes?*”

If the kid shows relief when we suggest kicking Mommy out, this gives us a lot of information. Listen to how they interact with each other. Watch their body language. We want to invite you to hone your observation skills and in this book will provide you with a lot of fun and interesting ways to do that.

Sometimes we use the parents as a prop. We might demonstrate the technique on the parent first to get the kid used to it, as well as model it to build expectation. Sometimes we utilize the mother so that we can throw a lot of embedded commands at the kid indirectly. Think of the situation as one which allows for a lot of subtle and not so subtle suggestions as well as a great opportunity to witness the dynamic between the two. We usually tell the parents

that there are no observers in our offices so they have to play and learn the techniques, too. (Considering that often, it's the parents that really need the help, this accomplishes a lot more than they realize.)

We never use scripts when working with a child. It's fine to read them at home, looking for ideas and inspiration, but when the kid is in front of you we believe in using what they bring and who they are *as the script*. It can even be okay to sometimes to say, *“I read this story the other day and it reminds me of you and your problem at school. Do you want to hear it?”* But that should be the only time to use pre-written metaphors.

We love stories and will share with you different ways of engaging kids in the storytelling process. From simple symptom metaphors of *“What is it like?”* to more engaging tales we co-create with a kid, you will learn to use the story to gather information, embed suggestions and create solutions. We have even provided fun hypnotic “Mad Libs” to keep it simple and funny and allow you to begin to develop your metaphoric muscles.

Unlike using story and metaphor with adults, where you allow their minds to extract the meaning, kids require a link. We tend to explain why we feel this story applies to them or how it reminds us of the struggle they had been having. Children under the age of seven just don't have the cognitive skills to extrapolate and even older kids, who do have abstract and metaphoric thinking, still require assistance in mapping metaphors across.

And this can be done in a cooperative way through questions such as, *“Why do you think I told that story?”* or, *“What does that remind you of?”* This approach may be enough to do the job. Later in this book, we will even introduce you to a cool technique for this called a *reverse metaphor*.

Getting Kids on Board

One of the biggest challenges in working with children is getting them to buy into what we offer. Much too frequently, we encounter a parent that wants us to use hypnosis to make their child do

something they don't want to do or stop doing something they aren't ready to stop. It's so important that the parents understand that this isn't what we offer. The bark like a dog, cluck like a chicken shtick they might have seen on stage is not really what hypnosis is like. If we cater to the parent and try to simply suggest away a symptom or command the kid to change we are setting ourselves and the kid up for failure. Besides being a waste of time and their money, it can also further cement one more negative experience into the mind of the child. And that's unacceptable to us.

We can prevent this by taking the time to have a thorough conversation with the parent before booking the appointment. Sometimes, it's pretty obvious that the problem lies primarily with the parent. Many times we even suggest that the parent come in for a stress reduction session first!

This lets the parent know you understand how hard and challenging their situation is, while you help the kid by taking Mommy or Daddy's stress levels down a few notches. This session can give you a lot of insight into what the kid is dealing with at home as well as clarify what hypnosis is and isn't to the parent.

As a rule, we help kids that want to change. And as with any rule, there are always exceptions. When young children are too young to know that their behavior is self-destructive or dangerous then we have a variety of ways to use play, story and other fun techniques to open up possibilities and get a child ready for change.

Once Everyone is Comfortable

We spend most of our time future-oriented. Usually by the time kids find their way into our offices, they have been through a slew of other therapists, doctors and school counselors, as well as trying to solve the problem at home. The last thing they need or want is to retell and recount the same litany of problems. Right from the start, we might ask questions like:

“When we solve this problem, what will be different for you?”

“I know you've been struggling and it's been hard, but when you think of how you want to be, what does that look like?”

“So your mom says you've been having trouble focusing at school, I know lots of cool ways to help you to focus better. Do you like video games?”

It's important to pace and lead. Always. If a kid comes in and they are clearly nervous, you don't just jump in all positive and bubbly. You always need to acknowledge the kid where they are and offer a bridge to where they want to be. You can say, *“I know it can be scary meeting someone new, I get nervous sometimes, too. Not knowing what's gonna happen and if you'll like them...luckily I help a lot of kids, like you, that come in a little nervous but leave here giggling.”*

Sometimes the child has a behavioral issue and the mom starts off with a long list of bad behaviors. We can put a hand up to stop her, which puts us on the kid's side, and say something to the child like, *“I know how hard it can be when you can't seem to get people to understand...and we all have some anger and frustration that can sometimes feel like it has a mind of its own...but that's what I'm here to help with. So where do you want to feel differently first?”* or, *“If you could be different, what would you do first?”*

It can also be helpful to, once a parent has expressed their impressions of the “problem”, to address the child directly and ask, *“Now that we have heard your mom's/dad's story, what do YOU think about this?”* The way that a child responds to this is indicative of how empowered they feel in the family system, but is not necessarily an indictment on how ready or not they are for change. It may take further rapport building for a kid to feel comfortable exploring and revealing this to you. Frankly, a lot of kids don't *know* how they feel about why they are there and it is our job to help them figure that out!

So don't get discouraged if you initially get only a series of shoulder shrugs or *“I don't know.”* responses. This just means you need to get a little more creative, which is always an opportunity to learn and play. You can turn to the parent and suggest *“Let me first show you a trick to stop fear,”* or whatever is close to the kid's issue. Then you might move into doing bi-lateral stimulation, tapping or any one of the fun pattern interrupt techniques covered in this book to get the kid curious.

Having Fun!

Many kids come in excited to be hypnotized. They are chomping at the bit and can't keep their eyes off our spirals and swinging watches (hung on the wall...you know...as a joke) and for these kids we jump right in, saying something like, *“So you know I'm a hypnotist...and I can tell you want to try something cool...are you ready to go into trance?”*

And then, depending on the kid, we give them a two-minute taste where we use direct suggestion of how, *“...because you are in hypnosis you are going to find it so much easier to...”* and then we link it to the issue. And when they come out of that brief bit of fun, they are jazzed. We then talk some more and go in again or we teach them self-hypnosis.

From Melissa:

I once had a kid staring at the hanging watch on my wall the whole time I was chatting with the mother. Finally he blurts out, *“When are you going to hypnotize me?”*, as he points to the watch.

I knew the trance he was expecting. I've seen enough Scoobie Doo to play the role so I reached over, unusually slow, as I dropped my voice and turned to him saying something like, *“And as you stare at this watch...looking right...and left...staring...you are getting sleeeeeepy... and sleeeepier...that's right...your eyes are getting sleeeeeepy...”* and as I continued like this his eyes were getting droopy and his arms started to slowly raise...'til they were out in front of him in a perfect simulation of the zombie-like trance in the cartoons!

If I could only go back in time to have had a camera rolling...just to capture the look on the mother's face! Oh, my God. It was brilliant. I then started loading in the direct suggestions, all the while in my Svengali voice. It took all of my power not to make him get up and shuffle around...

This leads us to a big idea: Hypnosis is built on expectation and belief. The kid described above thought that he would go into a zombie-like state and be forced to do Melissa's bidding. So he did. And we got the change he needed. When kids come in, ask them what they think will happen. This gives you a wealth of information to utilize. Some kids want the magic. For some, you need to normalize it like a daydream. Give the kid the trance they need and you'll be surprised at how easy it is.

Chapter 2 Introducing Trance

We believe that kids are going in and out of hypnotic states countless times a day. Kids under the age of five pretty much live in a hyper-suggestible state. We imagine that if you are reading this you already have a good understanding of hypnosis. But we are two women with very lofty goals for this book, which means that we hope to expand our readership to the curious therapist, coach, or healthcare provider wanting to learn different ways of helping kids of all ages.

Because hypnosis conjures up many different ideas and misinformation abounds, we will do our best to simplify and normalize the state so you'll understand how you, and even more so the kids you work with, slip in and out of it all the time. The following is a brief description adapted from Melissa's book, *The Anti-Anxiety Toolkit: Rapid Techniques to Rewire your Brain*.

One way to think of hypnosis is as a state of hyper-focused awareness, where the barrier that separates the conscious and the unconscious mind is pushed aside. This leads you into a state of heightened suggestibility. Now, there really isn't such a barrier but for our purposes, it's a metaphor that makes it easier to understand.

For example, every time you get wrapped up in a good movie you slip into a state of heightened suggestibility. And without even trying, or being aware of it, you push aside that critical faculty of the mind. It happens naturally. In movie lingo that's called *suspending disbelief*.

If you don't suspend disbelief when you sit down to enjoy a movie, you won't be able to forget that you're watching one. We know there's an actor, director, producer, sound crew, camera crew, lighting....well, you get the picture. There's a lot of stuff going on behind that camera but we don't think about that. Unless, of course,

the movie stinks. If the movie is bad enough, our critical faculty comes back on line and we pull out of the experience to critique.

When you have a focused state of awareness combined with suspending disbelief, you will have that heightened state of suggestibility. And this is one way to think about hypnosis.

This means that you jump when they want you to jump; you cry when they want you to cry. Why? After all, you're intelligent. You know it's not real. There's somebody who wrote it. Somebody directed it. Somebody re-wrote it; somebody argued about the re-writes...but it doesn't matter. For those two hours you are entranced.

An interesting feature of hypnosis is that on some level the brain doesn't know the difference between a real and an imagined event. So when the movie gets scary, your brain doses you with adrenaline, cortisol, and all the other stress hormones. Your heart beats faster and your breathing shifts. More blood goes to your arms and legs so that if you have to, you can fight or flight.

Unfortunately, the brain responds in the same way to our own internal movies—the ones that are made when you are imagining or worrying about doing something that makes you anxious. That fear focuses awareness and in doing so pushes aside the rational critiquing part of the mind.

That's an overly simple explanation but one that gives you an idea of how ubiquitous it is in our everyday experience. For young kids, as we said, they are almost always in receptive and suggestible states. This is why we are so excited to get these techniques into therapists' heads. Too much hypnosis is happening inadvertently.

Myth Collapse: No matter what you have heard, eye closure is not necessary for hypnosis, especially when it comes to children. We have found that some children and many younger ones (under 6)

actually have an aversion to closing their eyes!

Think about it: here you are, in a new place with a stranger who is demanding that you close your eyes...Even if a child isn't apprehensive about playing with you they may not want to miss out on anything by closing their eyes. Don't worry, though, we know that if you ask a child to pretend that there is a balloon floating above your head they will be able to tell you what color it is!

The challenge is to capture the child's attention in a way that is fun and intriguing. There are no limits to how you can do that. We'll talk more later about entrancing the really wee kids but here are some ways to work with kids of about 6 and older:

Utilize Beliefs and Expectation

There are so many different ways to introduce trance to kids. Sometimes it's as easy as asking them what they know about hypnosis. They will give you the experience they are expecting and you can jump right in. Here's how Melissa responded when one kid said this:

Kid: Well, I know you will have me stare into a spinny thing and you will talk in a slow voice and tell me what to do...

Hyp: Yes, that's one way...and what will I tell you to do?

Kid: You will tell me to stop biting my nails.

Hyp: And would you like that?

Kid: Yes.

Hyp: Why?

Kid: Because then I won't do it anymore.

Hyp: *So?*

Kid: *So my fingers will look nice, I won't have them bleed all the time...Mommy will be happy...*

Hyp: *And will you be happy?*

Kid: *Oh yes! I can have them painted pink!*

Hyp: *Okay, now, I want you to stare into this hypno spiral...and your eyes will get sleepy...verrrrry sleepy... (shifting into special Hollywood Hypno voice)*

Melissa then proceeded to tell the girl all the things she expected. She went right into a trance, eyes fluttering, breathing shifting...Melissa kept layering in embedded commands for “stop biting” and then had her see her pink nail polish...

Tip: Keep in mind that some kids will tell you exactly what they don't want you to do. And this allows you the luxury of getting them to tell you exactly what they DO want. And once again, you use that!

Create Belief and Expectation

Sometimes you can use explaining hypnosis to induce it. You can say something like...

Hyp: *Did Mommy tell you I'm a hypnotist?*

Kid: *Yes.*

Hyp: *Do you know what hypnosis is?*

Kid: *I'm not sure...*

Hyp: *Well, hypnosis is a way to get you really relaxed.*

Some kids feel relaxed right before they get sleepy at night...you know that feeling?...and when you start to notice a part of your body relaxing, you'll know it's starting to work...and because hypnosis lets us talk to the part of you that's in charge of that fear...you can relax as we tell that part it's ok...so nod your head when you notice a part of you feeling really relaxed...good and you might let that feeling spread to another part and then you know you can feel really comfortable...

Or, if relaxation seems way out of the kid's scope, you can go for “zoned”. Ask about that focus they have when they are playing their favorite video game, then say that hypnosis is a way of getting into that zone so they can focus where they need to. Have them describe the state and you can use a revivification induction to loop it. For example:

Hyp: How do you know when you're in the zone? When you are about to make it to the next level...that feeling...what's it like?

Kid: Um...my mind is focused.

Hyp: And when your mind is focused how does your body feel?

Kid: Um...light...like it's not even there. My hands are on the controls but it's like my arms aren't there or they stay up without me holding them up.

Hyp: That's right...and your hands are at the controls and your arms are just kind of light...and your mind is focused...and what else? How's your breathing shifting...now...?

Kid: My breathing is calm...but kind of excited when I'm winning...

Hyp: *And when your breathing is like that...and your body is light...and your winning...feel that focus...it's like...*

Kid: *A laser...like it's all I can see and hear...*

Hyp: *And when it's like a laser...and you're winning...calm...focused...hands in control...feel this focus...as you press down with your foot...as you imagine pressing down focuses the laser even more...*

Kid: *Yes...like stepping on the gas.*

Hyp: *That's right...whenever you need to focus...just press down on the gas...feeling your mind like a laser...hands in control...*

You can use this kinesthetic anchor to have him imagine being at his desk...and step on the gas and focus...or at bat...or wherever the kid needs some of that focus.

Tip: Kids go in and out so easily that we nearly always do many mini-sessions that last five minutes at a time. Each time they get better at shifting in.

Model and Rehearse

An easy method that's fun and engaging is to model and rehearse the induction. Show and tell them what is going to happen. Since we love hypnotic phenomenon to get the kids interested, inductions that create catalepsy or ideomotor responses can be a great way to enthrall. Here's an example of practicing arm catalepsy which turns into a leverage induction.

If you're not familiar with some of these terms, no worries, we will get to that. For now, know that a leverage induction is an induction

that uses something that seems like hypnotic phenomenon to create the state of hypnosis. In this case, arm catalepsy, which describes a kind of waxy flexibility where the arm can be positioned and stays like that without any conscious effort.

Hyp: *Let me show you how easy it is to go into hypnosis. Can I borrow your arm for a bit?*

Kid: *Are you gonna take it?*

Hyp: *No, you can keep it. I just want to show it how to go into hypnosis. Ok?*

Kid: *Yup.*

Hyp: (reaching over to position arm, bent at elbow) *Now, I'm going to put your arm like this, and when you are going to go into hypnosis, but not yet, you will feel that arm kind of staying there by itself. You'll feel yourself feeling a little different, calm, and I'll start speaking a little different and then that arm will stay up by itself. Now as I put it back down, you will come out of it. Got it?*

Kid: *Uh huh.*

Hyp: *So, let's practice again. I'll pick up that arm...and bend it like that...and you'll start to feel a little dreamy...and maybe your eyes will feel heavy or maybe it's just your legs that do...and I'll start talking slower...and you'll feel something happening...and then I'll take that arm and put it back down and you'll kind of wake up. You got it?*

Kid: *I already feel it, I think.*

Hyp: *Well, maybe some, but this time maybe even more, so I go to pick up that arm (kid's arm automatically goes up before Hyp touches it) that's right...and as I slow my talking...that's right, you'll notice your eyes are feeling*

heavy and maybe your legs...and you can let go now...and that arm stays up as long as you want to stay in hypnosis...now we can make some changes...

Explore and Get Creative

It's a good idea to ask a child why *they* think they have come to see us. If they tell us it's to help them to do better at school, we will ask them how they think that can happen. Kids have some ideas and as crazy as they are, we can use them. If the kid shrugs their shoulders and doesn't know, we can ask them if they ever felt like they wanted to change but just couldn't seem to yet. This gives us a way to introduce the idea that part of them wants to change, and that we have different ways to talk to that part.

This can set them up for any type of induction. An easy segue would be to have them stare at their hand. You can set up simple ideomotor signals by asking them which finger feels like a *Yes*. These mind-body responses are unconscious, involuntary movements caused by suggestion, expectation and belief. So to set up simple *Yes* and *No* signals, you can say "*My name is...*" And say the kid's name and ask which finger says *Yes*. Then set up a *No - Say*, "*My name is Bob*" and ask for the *No* finger.

Kids love this and, throughout your work, we suggest that you pay attention to the fingers because in a subsequent session, when the kid may have forgotten, those signals come in handy. (We talk more about ideomotor tools in our chapter on phenomena.)

Most young kids (3-6) don't require the formal hypnotic experience. This is where a lot of simple engagement and play comes in. But if given an opening by a curious child, we will jump in!

Kids, and most adults for that matter, love magic. We are big believers in using hypnotic phenomenon for building rapport and expectation as well as vehicles for absorption and change. Even the

simple old-fashioned suggestibility tests like magnetic hands, heavy book/balloon, and the lemon test can be great ways to introduce trance.

Become the Director

Kids love movies. Once you know the situation they want to change or feel differently about, you can have fun teaching them to make mental rehearsal movies. There's been enough research on athletes using this process to prove its value and efficacy.

We usually like to start by steering clear of the “official” problem and going straight for the fun stuff. If it's an athletic kid, we talk about the fact that most Olympic athletes know this technique and that in some studies basketball players improved their game by 47% with just a few sessions of visual training. For older kids and teens we talk about how the same regions of the brain are firing off as if they are actually playing the game. So by doing this they are creating stronger connections and taking the brain to the gym.

This lets the kids know that it's not “just imagination”. That's a phrase we think should never find its way out of anyone's mouth...but don't get us started.

So, for kids under seven or so, have them picture their favorite character up on the biggest screen they can imagine. Play with them by showing them they can speed it up, slow it down, rewind or jump into the movie and play with their character(s). This absorption creates a nice workable trance state. Be prepared for short bursts of creativity, going in and out of the play.

Take some breaks, talk about how much fun that was, and then go back in. This time, have them play out the desired outcome movie. If they want to feel safe at school have them make a movie of it. Keep it fun. Maybe Dora the Explorer is sitting at the desk next to them for the first movie. When the movie looks good and they can see

themselves how they want to be, have them imagine floating into the movie and try it on. This way they can feel how good it feels to be relaxed at school or focused while at bat or whatever other change they want to make.

Have them systematically rehearse what they want and if you keep it fun, making movies can become the new bedtime ritual.

If it's a memory that's causing the anxiety, shrink the screen to a cell phone size image and have them play with it; turn it into a black and white, grainy old movie, rewind and generally mess with it. Sometimes you can play with adding a silly soundtrack, fart noises (never underestimate the power of fart humor), etc., and then rewrite the ending.

For kids seven and older, we suggest teaching a rapid induction before the movie. This makes it a lot more powerful for the kid and gets conscious buy-in for the process. Since they have the capacity for more abstract kind of thinking, the movies can be a bit more involved.

Teach these kids how to pause and jump out. If you get them good at this, they can use it to give themselves a quick distancing technique when they find themselves in an anxiety-triggering situation. You can practice this by adding in a kinesthetic anchor for the pause button.

While playing with this, have the kid step out of the movie and imagine how they want to feel. Have them imagine trying on that better emotional state (like slipping on a coat of confidence or calmness) and stepping back into the movie and noticing how it feels. If they can't seem to access the state, help them by asking about a time they felt this. Have them imagine seeing what they saw, feeling what they felt and bringing that into the movie. You can ask them what color confidence feels like or even smells like and imagine sending that.

Simple Induction/ Self- Hypnosis Template

Here is a simple self-hypnosis template you can teach to older kids. It's an easy process that only takes a few minutes for them to do every day. We strongly recommend using a fun convincer for the first session. Teens are hard to impress and if you want them to actually do the hypnosis at home, you have to give them a bit of razzle dazzle. Later in the book you will learn a lot of different tricks and how to use hypnotic phenomenon to increase your fun and the kid's expectation.

A simple but impressive tool is “the heavy leg convincer” and it is easily combined with a bit of fractionation as in the following:

Go ahead and start by getting comfortable and finding a spot to focus on. Then diffuse your focus and relax your vision. Now close your eyes and think ‘ten’ as you imagine a wave of relaxation moving from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. Let it settle in with your breathing.

Now open your eyes and close them as you think ‘nine,’ and add another wave of relaxation down your body. Some people imagine seeing the numbers fading and relaxing right out of their mind.

Open and close, ‘eight’ and feel another layer of relaxation deepening this state of comfort. Allow every muscle to get even more relaxed as you continue counting down to one, opening and closing your eyes in between each count.

Now, just to show you how cool this state of mind is, I'm going to show you that you make a suggestion and even your body will believe you. Focus your mind on your legs. Imagine those legs are soooo relaxed they are heavy. Imagine them heavier than lead, heavier than when you are sleeping. Now, think the suggestion to yourself “my legs are so heavy” and because you are in an open receptive state, you will notice that your legs believe you.”

Ask the teen if they notice the heaviness and suggest that, *some people notice that heaviness even more when they try to lift those legs they become even heavier.* You will most likely see them trying to lift their legs, some will smile or chuckle and you reinforce it by saying,

So you are in a state of power. You think a suggestion and your body believes you. Now let's make movies that will act as direct suggestions to your unconscious mind.

Now imagine a movie screen in your mind. This is your template to play with at home. You can make a movie where you see yourself being or reacting exactly the way you want to.

When it looks really good and compelling, you can float into that movie and into the person who has already started to change. Feel how good it feels to be doing what you want to be doing and feeling how you want to be feeling.

Then float back into your body, shake it off, and smile. You might do this quick and easy exercise daily, changing the movies to reflect all the different ways you want to change.

If you find that visualizing a movie and floating into it isn't easy for you, then you can simply imagine, after counting down, how you would feel if you had changed. Feel what it would feel like if you were already how you want to be and doing what you want to do.

Some kids have a hard time visualizing movies. (One boy with Asperger's told Kelley, "*My brain just doesn't work like that!*") In these rare cases we instruct them how to make positive suggestions to themselves. Make sure to explain to them that the unconscious mind has a harder time processing negation and to keep it positive. You can ask the kid what happens when they "try not to think of a

pink elephant” and they will smile as they realize they just thought of a pink elephant. We then explain that instead of going into hypnosis and saying to themselves, “*I won't be afraid,*” or “*I won't fail,*” that they should say, “*I feel calm and confident.*”

Many people in the hypnosis field believe that the unconscious cannot process negatives; this isn't actually true but we find that by acting as if it is, we remember to keep things positively stated so the mind is focused on outcome and not problem. Remember, so much of our problems are about where and on what we are putting our attention.

Pretending Trance

This induction works really well on adults as well as kids and can bring some play into your grown up sessions. It's basically a revivification induction with zero pressure. You have the kid close their eyes and pretend to go into a deep hypnotic state. As pointed out already, most kids have seen some exaggerated form of hypnosis in cartoons. There's also a very popular children's book series called, *Molly Moon and The Big Book of Hypnotism*, so we have plenty of source material with which to play.

Here's an example:

As you close your eyes, pretend to go into a deep hypnotic trance. Pretend that your arms and legs are getting heavy or maybe even floaty. Some people pretend by remembering a super relaxed state they were in that time...and how that body starts to feel...different. Some kids pretend by imagining they are going into that trance from Scooby Doo, or another cartoon...and they pretend that they are feeling so relaxed

that their mind can drift...pretending to go into a state of total comfort...where things will get easier and changes will happen...pretending to relax so the mind can begin helping to find some easy answers...to what had seemed to be problems but really...when relaxed...seem smaller...pretending to now be open to all the suggestions...because you are in a deep state...you can hear the suggestions you need...to change...

Conscious/Unconscious Dissociation

There are many ways to use the idea of separating conscious and unconscious processing in your work. A standard form of this is to begin, right from the start of the session, to mark out a subtle tonal or spatial difference when mentioning features of the unconscious mind. By shifting your voice when describing aspects of the unconscious, or for younger kids, their wise or inner mind, you begin to build a foundation for multi-level communication.

This allows you to embed subtle messages that bypass conscious awareness and have more of an impact. For instance, when you start a pre-talk to an older kid or teen, you can mention things like:

I know you've been trying to change this for a while. But the good news is that you were only using your conscious mind, which is really limited. Your unconscious has unlimited processing abilities so you can change more easily...Your conscious mind can process about forty bits of information, while your unconscious processes millions.

Your conscious mind is linear and has to process one thing after another, but your unconscious has simultaneous abilities and can search for solutions in different ways. Your conscious mind can go over and over the problem, but your unconscious has access to the solutions...

By setting this up, you can begin layering suggestions throughout the session. One way is to simply shift tonality when you ask things like, “So what do *you want to change today?*” Or, as Melissa’s friend, John Overdurf, might say, “That’s how you’ve *been*, how do you want to *be different?*”

And for the rest of your work with that kid, every time you want a little extra umph, you shift your tone. This turns any little question or story into a perfect opportunity to prime the mind so *you can help them change* more easily.

Conscious/Unconscious Hand Induction

This is a fun one for kids, teens and grown-ups. It’s a no-pressure induction that allows you to build on the conscious/unconscious dissociation while giving the client something concrete to focus upon. It is one of Melissa’s go-to inductions for all types of clients. Start by having the kid focus on one of their hands and begin very slowly, lifting that hand one fraction at a time very consciously. Here’s an example:

So as you sit back and relax I want you to focus on your right hand. Focus all of your attention on that hand, noticing the subtle shifts and sensations in those fingertips and that palm as you very consciously begin lifting that hand very slowly. Consciously noticing the changes...as you continue...one fraction of a fraction of an inch at a time. Lifting that hand, oh, so slowly as you focus all of your conscious attention on how that lifting feels as it changes...

The way you can feel the changing tension in the

wrist...that hand...as you focus all your conscious attention on that...so your unconscious mind can focus on what's more important for you. As you continue lifting that hand very consciously...your unconscious can begin going through those files...finding moments of calm and letting go...because you've had many experiences of calm that your unconscious can access...so that you begin to shift in a way that allows you to feel really relaxed...and open to new ideas...while all you have to do consciously is continue focusing on that lifting hand.

And as that hand has lifted all the way up you can now begin, still...very consciously...moving down...that hand, even more slowly, as your unconscious begins connecting that calm to where you need it the most...

And this creates a deep state of trance that you can use for any type of change work. Sometimes we suggest that the unconscious goes through the files, finding feelings of confidence and then as they lower that hand the unconscious will connect confidence to everywhere they need it. You can suggest that that hand can lower only as quickly as the unconscious can generate some creative ideas for some solutions to that problem.

This induction is great for that analytical adult as well. We find that by instructing the client to lift it one fraction of a fraction at a time it mimics the jerky movements typical of the unconscious mind. It then becomes a leverage induction by inducing catalepsy which helps to deepen the state. Play with it, people. We promise it will become one of your favorite ways of inducing a deep, yet flexible, state of trance.

Shift Physiology to Affect Emotional States

Somewhere along the way, we want to make sure that our clients understand the mind-body connection. It's easy to demonstrate it with something like a sour candy imagery experience (our kid version of the lemon convincer) and kids usually get the idea right away about how their body is instantly responding to whatever they are thinking or feeling. Take the lesson to another level when you let them know that that connection goes two ways.

You can guide them to imagine seeing their shoulders straightening, their face changing and taking on the physiology associated with the emotion they want. This in itself is a fantastic exercise for kids. One of the fastest ways to change an emotion is to change the physiological state. When we work with kids and they've been describing the problem, before ever asking them how they want to feel, we have them sit up or shift in their seat. This is an important aspect of using the body to change the mind.

Chapter 4 Your Kid Tool Kit

Changing States to Rewire the Brain

Unconscious patterns and programs are formed by repetition. Anything done, felt or even imagined repeatedly begins to create habituated programs. Neurons that fire together wire together and when practiced become the glue that holds these habits together. Luckily, as we discussed before, the brain is more malleable and plastic than we once thought. And children's brains are much more so. They are making massive changes all the time, reinforcing as well as pruning connections at a rate that almost defies imagination.

Think about when you first learned to drive. It took all your conscious awareness to focus on steering and being aware of the gas, brakes, rear view mirror, speedometer and everything else you needed to pay conscious attention to. Then you drove for a while and before you knew it, your unconscious took over, and you found yourself chatting, daydreaming, eating, and listening to the radio—all while driving the car.

It's the same reason why they say you never forget how to ride a bike. It takes all your cognitive awareness to program the balance and fine motor skills involved in riding a bike, and once it's done, you never have to consciously think about it again because your unconscious rides the bike. And although that's great for an afternoon bike ride, it's not so great when it triggers anxiety or unwanted impulses.

We want to teach kids how to practice making different connections. If the tools are fun and reward them with a better feeling state, they will play with them. And when they do, they're creating patterns that have the potential to create unconscious programs that will begin to run on their own.

Another way to think of these habituated patterns is like pathways

in a forest. Every time the kid feels anxious in certain situations or do the unwanted behavior they are treading down the same path. Through repetition, they have made that path wide and a little too easy for their mind to traverse.

By teaching kids these tools and ways of feeling differently in those same situations, it's like you are helping them to cut a new path. And the more pathways you can take from any given situation, the more choices these kids have. With the amount of pruning happening in the kid brain naturally, these tools help this process along so that old path will get overgrown quickly.

At first it might be a bit difficult because, just like in a forest, cutting a new trail might require some clearing. This is where your alliance is vital. Having a trusted companion that knows different ways of clearing old fears is like going on a hike with an expert in the trails. It can be fun, interesting, and at times challenging but well worth the view.

We also encourage children to teach these things to parents and other people in their life. We know that every time they teach someone something valuable, it reinforces the learning and gives kids and teens an extra bit of investment in the process. It also allows them to be in a position of power as well as giving them opportunities to interact with family members in a very different way.

Something else to keep in mind is that the child and teen brain are not fully wired up. When we work with teens especially we have to remember that they have hormones putting them in overdrive. Even more important than the hormonal upheaval is the fact that the frontal lobe that acts as executive control isn't fully connected to modulate and keep the impulsivity in check. The brain wires from back to front so the command center that makes rational decisions, plans, and keeps the emotional brain in line, isn't fully staffed.

Just because teens can look like adults doesn't mean we should expect their brains to act like they are. This is one of the most important things to remind parents of. The brain is in a state that craves novelty and new experiences to excite synaptic connections and neurogenesis but the pre frontal cortex isn't capable of risk inhibition, analysis and control. So when you can't quite believe that teen did that crazy thing, remember what's happening or rather not happening under the hood.

Creating New Brain Habits

Back to cars for a moment. You might remember your driving instructor stressing how important it was to not only look where you want the car to go but to also look far enough ahead. If you turned and waved at a friend as you drove by you might have veered toward them because we tend to go where our attention is focused. Likewise, if you stared directly over the hood at the pavement you would lack the vision that allows us the time to react to sudden changes...leading you soon toward trouble.

This is a great metaphor to prime a teen's imagination for practicing mental rehearsal. If we can winningly make the case for creating new, positive neural pathways and then teach our young clients *how* to do it, success will be theirs.

This chapter covers many different tools that we teach kids for self-regulation. Although each chapter contains new techniques and processes we wanted to put the pattern interrupts we use for rewiring the brain in one place. We give these things to our clients as a form of “self-directed neuroplasticity” which allows them to rewire any habituated pattern of thought, feeling or behavior. This protocol is based on some of the research of Dr. Jeffrey Schwartz, MD, who developed a four step protocol for helping patients with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder rewire the part of the brain causing the problem.

We encourage you to check out his work as it has played a pivotal role in our thinking. Melissa has a whole chapter devoted to it in her book, *Keeping the Brain in Mind: Practical Neuroscience for Coaches, Therapists and Hypnosis Practitioners*, co-written with her student, Shawn Carson. We piggy backed on his research because he did the brain studies but our change work follows the same sequence.

Dr. Schwartz has shown that in as little as six weeks the brain area involved is completely changed. Unfortunately, his protocol didn't include these techniques. His clients had to white knuckle it by noticing the compulsion, telling themselves "*it's just my brain, it's not me; my brain is making a mistake*" and then they had to do anything other than the compulsive action for at least fifteen minutes. From there they reassessed their issues and acknowledged that not giving in and heading towards freedom was better than being stuck in the OCD loop. Dr. Schwartz was unknowingly using the meta pattern of change.

Our protocol is so much easier because the techniques not only interrupt the pattern, they create different resource states. This makes the rewiring easy and empowering. The next chapter will cover the meta pattern so you understand the underlying structure of change as well as having conversational ways of creating it. Subsequent chapters will show you these techniques and patterns in action.

Bi-Lateral Stimulation

This technique involves stimulating both sides of the brain to stop anxiety. It is absurdly simple yet amazingly effective. Kids love it because it's fast and active. You can keep a drawer full of different colored balls and let them choose one. If the kid has something they hold or keep with them all the time, then you can use that. Grab a ball and have the kid think of something that is causing them some

anxiety. Or to bring up the emotion that's associated with the problem they are coming to you for.

Ask them where they feel the emotion in their body and have them rate the level of it on a scale of one to ten. This helps to localize and minimize the problem by turning it into a somatic experience.

Now have them pass the ball back and forth, from one hand to the other, crossing the mid line, so they are stimulating both hemispheres of the brain. It will have a more rapid effect if you show them how to keep one hand in front of them as the other swings out to the side with each pass. Do this for a minute. Stop. Take a deep breath, and check in. Remember you are modeling for the kid, so as you begin passing the object back and forth, allow yourself to visibly relax. Shift your breathing and you will notice when the kid begins to mirror you.

This process works because by activating both hemispheres, you are spreading blood and electrical impulses throughout the brain and creating a more balanced state. You will notice that the kid usually moves that ball back and forth pretty quickly, matching the “hot and fast” states of anxiety. Helping them slow down the action will add another layer of positive entrainment as their nervous system automatically matches the action.

Kids can use this easy tool anywhere, anytime. Just knowing they can stop the feeling is often all they need to experience less and less of it. And remember, each time they use it, they are helping to rewire the old response.

Peripheral Vision (Stop the World)

It's really hard to keep anxiety, insecurities and compulsive tendencies without inner dialogue. If we help kids to stop telling themselves how scared, messed up, or not good enough they are,

then it's a whole lot easier to think new thoughts. There are a few ways we like to play with a kid's inner critic. One way that really allows them the pause they need is by shifting into peripheral vision. This state not only quiets the mind, it also creates a general sense of calm.

Have the kid start by picking a spot or focal point to stare at. We like to have cool things to focus on to keep it fun. Slowly begin to expand their peripheral vision by having them become aware of all the space around the spot. Then encourage them, while still gazing at the focal point to imagine seeing the walls on either side of them all the way and ask them to imagine stretching their vision as if they can feel the space behind them.

You'll see their body relax, breathing shift and then have them come back to focus and ask what that was like. Have them come up with a word that describes it. Ask them if they noticed they stopped talking inside their head. Then guide them into doing this a few times. Each time have them think the word, so it becomes a simple auditory anchor.

Then future pace this by having them imagine going into the situation where they usually feel the problem and shifting out. You can use the trigger as the focal point. In other words, if the kid gets anxious when the teacher calls on her, practice this with the teacher as the focal point. If it's an elevator, use the doors opening as the focal point.

This is what Carlos Castaneda called "stopping the world." We teach it to our bigger clients too because it allows them to move awareness from the inside, out.

The best thing about peripheral vision is that it can be done anywhere, anytime and with practice, becomes another way of being in the world.

Heart Coherence

This technique is adapted from the work of the HeartMath Institute, which is a group of doctors and psychologists who are studying heart rate variability and coherence and its effect on mental and physical health.

Start by having the kid focus on his heart. Sometimes we ask them to put their hand there and, imagine breathing deeply, in and out, from their heart. If this is too abstract for the younger child, then you can tell them to imagine a stream of color going in and out of their hand. Make sure to time your words to their breath and begin shifting into a relaxed state as you do. Having them breathe in for the count of five and exhale for five has been shown to create a coherent heart rate. You can keep a bunch of stickers in your drawer and have them pick one to put on their clothes near their heart.

You can also have them think of someone or something they love as they do this. It can really be one of the easiest ways for a kid to shift out of an unwanted state quickly. Rick Hanson has a great quote for rewiring the brain. He says “*practice an emotional state until it becomes a neural trait.*” This is one way to help kids to do that.

This exercise does a few different things. The heart is the strongest emitter of electromagnetic energy in the body. By teaching kids this exercise you are helping them to entrain their brain into a coherent and more relaxed brain-wave state.

The heart sends information to the brain in many ways: electromagnetically, which is how EKGs work; through the pulse, which sends information through a blood pressure wave and biochemically, through releasing atrial peptide, a hormone that inhibits other stress hormones. Some research suggests it is another way to stimulate the vagus nerve.

You can find out more by going to the heartmathinstitute.com.

A Jaw-Dropping Moment

Another quick way to begin to take some of the power away from anxiety is to help kids create a jaw dropping experience. Teach them to focus on their jaw and relax it as much as they can. Have them imagine it like jelly or something they come up with. Tell them to loosen it even more, and imagine it dropping to the floor.

Doing this stimulates the vagus nerve which carries information from the nervous system to the brain, keeping it informed about what the body is doing. When you drop your jaw you are stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system to counteract the fight or flight response. And you are also encouraging the lungs to reach for a nice deep breath, creating a flood of the bio-chemicals associated with the relaxation response.

So show your kid client how to relax their jaw, take a deep breath in, and pause for three counts. Then have them exhale twice as long through their nose. When they inhale deeply, have them put their hand on their belly and feel it rise. This ensures that they're breathing from the diaphragm.

You can teach them to inhale to a count of four, pause for three, and exhale for eight. You can spend some time coming up with a fun phrase or song that coincides with this tempo and makes it easier and more fun for them to remember. Use your hand to tap out the sequence as you play with different phrases.

Kelley taught a piano-playing kid to use his fingers to play out his breath, anchoring the action for relaxation. He could do it anywhere and get some piano practice in at the same time! Remember to utilize what rocks the kid's boat.

Relief is in Their Hands

As anxiety, apprehension or anger comes on, many kids experience a tightening of muscles. Sometimes instead of trying to go from tension right into relaxation or a calmer emotional state, it's easier for kids (and adults) to amp it up. Ask them to imagine all that anger or fear funneling it down into their hands as they make a tight fist.

You might say: Imagine every drop of that anger (or fear or whatever) flowing into that fist and the more it does, the tighter the fist. Once it has built up, and all the anger is in that hand, let it go. Imagine it flowing out or just dropping to the floor. You might even shake it out until that hand gets nice and loose.

One kid imagined it turning into a hard ball in his hand and he would throw it and feel better. The same kid explained that when he was feeling anxious and he would send it to his hand to make the ball, which he then passed back and forth until he felt calm. How cool is that?

Some kids add a color to that tension and visualize it flowing down their arm, into their fist and then out their fingertips as they let it all go. You can teach them to play in different ways by having them hear the tension as a sound and noticing as it changes when they let it go. You can make a whooshing sound as an example and let the kid take it from there.

A variation of this is another simple anchor collapse routine:

Begin by creating expectation that what you are going to teach them will really make a difference and it will happen quickly!

Have the child hold both hands up in front of them. Get them in touch with the unwanted feeling or problem and make a fist with one hand, as above, letting all of the emotions and sensations flow

into that fist. Hold it for a few moments, then release it. Use a deep breath to break state.

Have the kid think of something or someone they love, or a favorite experience and have them make a fist with the opposite hand, anchoring that state. Hold it for a few moments, then release it. Use a deep breath to break state.

Finally, and this is where the magic happens, have the child make fists with both hands and count: 5...4...3...2...1 Open both fists and use one more deep breath. Ask them to notice how good they feel. They will nod or smile.

Then, ask them where that old yucky, negative feeling went? They'll try to find it and notice that it has either reduced, receded or entirely disappeared and will be amazed. Take advantage of that powerful moment and ask them when they could use this simple tool. You want to make the case for frequent use, so that it will help them stay *ahead* of tension, anxiety, pain, etc.

Credit to Michael Ellner, Richard Jamison and Alan Barsky for their Emotional Detox Technique we spun this from. See the Sports Performance chapter, *Getting Their Black Belts*, for another application of this...

The Backward Spin

One of the consistent things about anxiety and fear is that it's a physical feeling in the body. It's always moving, and usually it's moving too fast.

Think of the last time you got startled. You might remember the feeling starting somewhere in your body (for example, in your belly). It moves up (or down) and finally out as the fear passes through you.

But with anxiety, the fear moves up or down, but it doesn't move

out. It keeps circulating through the body. This is why we say that fear has a spin.

This technique is a way to interrupt that cycle. It comes from Richard Bandler, the co-creator of Neuro-Linguistic-Programming (NLP) and can be used for many different uncomfortable emotional states. You only need go through the exercise with kids once, and they are then able to use it on their own as a rapid way out of anxiety and into a far more resourceful state.

Here's how it works: have the child locate where they feel the anxiety moving in their body, and notice which way the feeling spins. Have them show you the spin with their hands.

Next, have them imagine they can move the spin outside of their body. Use your hands to show them how to reverse the spin. You'll notice a shift in their facial expression as they do this. It always feels different.

Then have them imagine bringing the spin back inside the body, rotating in this opposite direction. Ask them to notice how it feels different. Now, have them think of something funny and add some laughter to the spin. You can just point at them and tell them to laugh. This is so strange that they usually laugh at us or we might ask them to give a loud fake laugh and this makes us both laugh.

We are big proponents of laughter. Kelley and Dave Berman even co-authored a book on the subject, *Laughter for the Health of It*. When you encourage kids to laugh, you are creating a whole host of beneficial side effects beyond the chemical and hormonal changes in the body. Adding a lot of levity into your sessions with kids should be one of your goals.

The great thing about doing this process with kids is that once they know what to look for, they notice a spin to a bunch of other feelings and can quickly reverse it. This usually makes them chuckle as the laugh gets anchored into the backward spin.

Shifting Perspective:

You've learned how to locate the spin and reverse it. Now get ready to learn other fast ways to use metaphors and change the feeling.

Teach the kid that as they start to feel anxious, locate where it is in their body. Have them notice the shape or other qualities of it and try playing with it. Change the shape and shrink it down and notice what happens.

Tell them to imagine it has a color. What color does it feel like? Now, what color would feel better? Imagine as they change the color to the one that feels better, that the anxiety changes into something else. What has it changed into?

Another way of feeling better is to imagine dropping right to the center of that anxiety and breathing through it. Notice what happens. As you guide them to drop to the center ask, "*If this were a message, what is it?*" or "*If this feeling we're trying to tell me something, what is it?*"

You could have them imagine that anxiety as a pebble. Now imagine that pebble amongst many on a wide expansive beach. Now imagine that beach on an island. And that island in an ocean. On a planet...in a galaxy. Or that feeling as a brick, the brick in a wall...that wall on a building...that building on a street...

Anything that shifts foreground/background is going to shift experience. John Overdurf has some great questions that do this, like "*What's everything else that's not that anxiety that you haven't been noticing that you can, now?*" which is an excellent way to get older kids into a more malleable state of mind. Kids that are under seven tend to just get confused, which isn't as good a state to work in as it is in adults.

The Metaphoric Two-Step

Once the kid has located where the feeling is in their body, ask them “*What is this like?*” and see what metaphor emerges. Sometimes it's easier to ask “*If this feeling looked like a cartoon, what would it be?*”

One kid Melissa worked with said it was like “*Smoke coming out of Tom's ears*” and when asked “*What has to happen to stop smoke from coming out of Tom's ears?*” he said “*Throw a bucket of ice water on him.*” She then had him close his eyes and imagine that. She could see his body relax as he smiled and said “*Tom was all wilty*” and then she had him imagine the situation that had caused the anger and the kid said he felt fine and that it seemed “*kind of silly*”.

Another little girl said the fear was like a bunch of angry bees flying around and when Melissa asked her what has to happen with the bees she said to give them their honey back. She had her close her eyes and imagine giving them their honey back and she said they were happy and sleepy and took a nap. And Melissa instructed her to imagine walking into gym class, which is what triggered the anxiety, but now with the bees napping and she said she felt much better.

A teen described her anxious feelings about speaking in the front of the class as “*a bowl of fish stew*”. No offense to Scandinavians who love this stuff, but this kid found it horrible, just like her fear of public speaking. When given the power to change it, she chose to empty the bowl into the gutter and instead fill it with a light, clear liquid that smelled delightful to her. She sipped from it and felt an energizing confidence move through her.

The real key to any intervention is to make sure we take the resource, the better feeling state, and bring it to the trigger. This is how we collapse the anchors and rewire the response. Make sure to do this many times because through repetition, we condition it in.

This sounds way too easy, we know. It still surprises us that this process works. But when you understand that the unconscious mind speaks in metaphor, you understand how malleable our experience really is. There are really just two questions you have to ask:

“What is it like?” or, *“If it were a cartoon, what would it be like?”*

“What has to happen for it to change?”

Be sure to let the kid come up with the metaphor and more importantly, the counter metaphor. If they need help, you can offer some possibilities using the *“Some kids imagine...”* or, *“One little boy said his fear was like angry bees...”* And let that prompt them to come up with their own.

The Director Technique

For older kids, we can add another step and use a stage metaphor. This fun version from NLP is often a hit, especially for any change work involving performance, action, habits, etc. We like to teach a kid that they can use it on their own, walking them through the process. We've included it here with the pattern interrupts because we anchor in a pause button that they can then use to jump out of any unwanted emotional state.

Here's how we do it:

Step One clarifies and acknowledges the issue from a dissociated state:

1. Seat them in an imaginary theater by themselves, looking down at the stage where a scene from the play of their life is about to begin. This scene will portray how they have struggled with (x problem). Tell them that they are the director of this play and they get to design the set. Let them spend some time doing that; you can

prompt them by suggesting that they pay attention to lighting, music or sound effects, props, etc. There are no limits to this so encourage them to get creative. When they are ready,

2. Tell the kid that someone is walking onto the stage and this someone is an actor who may or may not look just like them. As the director, they need to instruct the actor on how to play the role of themselves. They need to be sure to tell that actor how it feels to have that problem, how it looks, etc. When this is ready,

3. Have them call out “*Action!*” (beware, some kids yell it!) and then let the scene play through, making sure all of the misery, frustration, annoyance, negative effects, etc., is demonstrated fully. Then have the kid hit “pause” so all the action stops. Sometimes have them play with this a few times, linking the word “pause” to a tap on their hand to anchor it in.

Step Two allows the kid to create a different script:

1. Advise the kid that now they are going to direct a new scene, one that will depict the solution or absence of the problem. Have them attend to the set, making changes that are congruent to improvement. You can suggest that they bring in any resources that will enhance the change. This is a great time to apply any other skill sets that you have already taught them.

2. Ask the kid to update their actor regarding the desired change - this may mean adjusting body language, emotions, responses, using those resources, along with experiencing any benefits to the change.

3. Let the action roll again, reminding the kid that they are directing the show and they can handle anything that they want. They may even be open to having a stumbling block thrown in to see how the actor does. Upon a satisfactory performance, have the kid thank and dismiss the actor.

Step Three moves the kid down into the action for firsthand experience:

1. Tell the kid it's time for them to go down there and be in their own play. Associate them onto the stage and let them make any adjustments. Remind them of the characteristics of the role, their resources, etc. Have them practice hitting the “pause” button to reinforce the anchor.

2. Even though the action is self-directed, you can prompt from the sidelines. You want to keep them moving into the successful states, feeling empowered by applying their new skills or mindset. We usually launch into a full mental rehearsal from this point, using any of our time travel metaphors and leave the stage behind.

Future pace by having the kid imagine future scenes in real life where they can practice using the “pause” button. It's very rare, but if a kid is still struggling or running into blocks, you can help them tap into their creativity and bring in some help, even saying, “*Break! Let's do Take 2!*”

Note: See our *A is for Anxiety* chapter to read how Kelley helped a young man get over his fears with The Director Technique as well as the chapter on Trance-Forming Trauma to see the full Visual/Kinesthetic Dissociation pattern from NLP, which adds some fun variations.

Emotional Freedom Technique

This technique is one of our power tools. If there is one approach that you should spend some time experimenting with, this should be it. We have seen EFT help more kids with more things than any other. From knocking out fears and phobias to crushing cravings and compulsions, it's one of the most well-worn technique in the toy chest.

Emotional Freedom Technique, otherwise known as EFT, is a form of energy psychology that involves tapping on powerful acupuncture points while redirecting the mind. We don't claim to know exactly how this thing works, we just know that it does, time and time again. With kids, we find the short version to be easier for them to own so we will be sharing the faster EFT process. This consists of tapping on four points and conditioning in an anchor for a state of calm. This variation was developed by Robert Smith and you can learn more from his free videos on his web site, www.fastereft.com.

For a more in-depth learning of this technique in its original form, go to emofree.com or eftuniverse.com, where you can read the research as well as the hundreds of articles on different applications of EFT to a wide range of issues.

One of the most important aspects of using EFT involves creating expectation within a kid that what you are sharing with them will help. For teens, do a sound setup in this regard, explaining how our body downloads the emotional content of what we experience and how that might take a toll on us. Using EFT helps to discharge that download in a very organic way, often without having to even delve deeply into the conscious awareness of the problem. This can be very attractive to young people and get them on board.

We start by setting an anchor for peace and calm. With adults we can usually have clients simply think of a vacation spot or whatever

it is that allows them a sense of peace. With kids, it's not always that straight forward. Sometimes asking kids how they will feel when this problem is solved and have them imagine feeling it, will get you the dose of relief that you can then anchor.

Sometimes, if you are teaching one of the other process like heart breathing and see the kid getting really relaxed, simply have them open their eyes and grab their wrist as they take a deep breath in and exhale saying "*let go*" or "*feel good*" or you can have the kid come up with a word or phrase that feels good.

By having this anchor, the kid can sometimes just use this for a quick shift when EFT may not be appropriate or they're not comfortable tapping. (Although, it's a good idea to show a kid how they *can* tap covertly, under a desk or on their thigh, for example.)

Now let's link it to the tapping of the acupuncture points. Start by having the kid think of the fear or emotion linked to the issue. Ask the kid where she feels it in her body and then tap on yourself and ask her to follow. At each tapping point you are just asking the kid to say "*I can let this go*". The first point is between your eyebrows (your third eye) Then tap on the side of the eye, under the eye and then your collar bone, all while repeating and having the kid repeat "*I can let this go*". Then grab your wrist, take a deep breath in and as you slowly exhale say "*peace*" or whatever works with that particular kid.

We do this many times, sometimes spending the whole session tapping on any and all emotions linked to the issue. If it's for a habit like nail biting, hair pulling or some other compulsive feeling, we keep having the kid go and get the feeling right before they bite or pull and we teach them to tap it down. This gives them time to really learn this technique while systematically helping the brain to rewire the compulsion. You might be surprised how quickly and thoroughly this technique works for kids.

Balloon Release (Object Imagery)

Much like the previously described process of using imagery of a balloon to release tension and stress, suggest the child pretend there is a balloon floating nearby. Let him choose the color and size of it and then tell them that they can gently breathe any unhelpful feeling, either emotional or physical into it.

As they do so, describe how it is growing in size, getting bigger and bigger, perhaps the color is becoming brighter, etc. When they are ready, they can decide what to do with that balloon: let it float up through the ceiling and out into the air, let it fizzle away with a funny sound or, maybe they'd like to pop it!

One small client of Kelley's had a great time releasing his "balloon" and then blasting it repeatedly as he described how all of the "yucky boogers" were splattering all around the room. It was wonderful, despite the gross imagery, to watch a previously glum kid go to an animated, laughing one.

The World Around You

We'd like to open your mind to the idea that you are not limited to your office or other typical area of hypnosis practice. Consider meeting your young clients outside of your comfort zone; their own homes, sports practice location, a public setting, etc. You can use these environments as dynamic instruments of change, especially when you and the child are involved in physical activities such as feeding birds, riding bikes, or throwing pebbles into a pond.

One of our favorite stories from Nathan Welch, a skilled family therapist in the UK, featured how he helped a young child who was struggling with separation anxiety due to being placed away from his family. Nath took the kid to a petting zoo where he pointed out how, amid the many animals, were some that were not born into particular families there...and yet, they were happy and content!

Imagine bringing a child out into nature where you can utilize the unlimited examples of resilience, co-existence, creativity and good vibes. Playing a game of Eye Spy helps improve a kid's focus and awareness, especially if you are on a mission to collect red things. A walk on the beach is rife with opportunities to discover treasures, clears the mind and shifts perspectives. And the entrancing ebb and flow of the water may find you taking a break for a bit of spontaneous hypnosis!

Kelley lives north of Seattle, an area of the country famous for its rainfall. You are probably not surprised to hear that one of her best depressed-kid interventions involves mud puddles. Not one parent has ever complained about wet shoes once they see that long-missed glow of happiness on their child's face and more than one parent has promised to make mud puddling a regular family event.

So, step outside and look around...you will find many wonderful tools awaiting you and your kid clients.

Chapter 8 Attention!

So many kids today are being brought to us with “attention” issues. Whether the problem is called ADD or it’s just a case of poor study habits, you can give kids ways to apply the extreme focus they have for video games, computers, or other passions and paste it to wherever they need it. That’s right, it’s a copy and a paste, again!

Here’s an example of a recent session:

Hyp: So, Mom says you've been having trouble focusing on school work. Do you want some help with that?

Kid: Yeah. I have ADD so my brain doesn't let me focus. I sit at my desk and my mind just can't keep still. I know how to do it, I'm good at math...I just...

Hyp: Well, the funny thing about brains is they can be choosy about focus. There's a kid I helped who had it much worse than you, but didn't have any problems focusing on his computer games. His brain chose that as something interesting enough to use laser like focus. Is there something your brain chooses? Something you can do for hours?

Kid: I'm really good at pokeman. Mom gets mad when I play too much.

Hyp: When you play, what does it feel like? Imagine for a moment you are playing. See what you see, feel what you feel, hear the game. Even hold your hands at the controls. Good. Get to the point in the game that requires the most attention.

Kid: (breathing has shifted, body is still) Yeah, I can get through most levels...

Hyp: *And as you're feeling this, focus, press down with your foot...that's right, and imagine as you press down you get even more focused...getting to the next level. Got it?*

Kid: *Got it.*

Hyp: *Good. Now pressing down, focusing still, imagine being at your desk and focusing in on that math...you're good at it. Now go back to the game...getting close to the next level...feel that focus. How does your body feel?*

Kid: *Good. Warm in my chest...my arms are kinda tingly.*

Hyp: *And feeling good, that warmth in your chest and arms kinda tingly...now pressing down with your foot and see the math...focusing...*

Kid: *Yeah. Weird.*

Hyp: *We are weird, aren't we? And your brain can focus...on that game...and solving how to get to the next level...finding the answer...and you're good at math, right?*

Kid: *Yep...*

Hyp: *And pressing down with your foot...be at your desk figuring it out. How does it feel now?*

Kid: *Different. I can feel the warm... like I'm playing.*

Hyp: *And anytime you sit at your desk or in school you can press your foot down and you'll focus...feeling that warmth, that tingly feeling as you focus...*

That was an easy way to set a kinesthetic anchor and use the same copy and paste sequence. Almost all of kids who present to us with focusing issues have some topic that fascinates them. You just have to find it, recreate the feeling and paste it to where they need it. Over

and over again. This will condition it in. With the example above, we looped it many times, took a break, and hit it again to make sure that when he imagined being at his desk, he still felt the focus.

By framing it as “your brain can be choosy” instead of accusing the kid of being able to focus on games and not school, you skip the whole self-defensive stance. And it is true, of course. The brain has evolved to pay attention to certain things and not others.

You want to remember to keep this fun. The brain pays attention when dopamine is flowing. Dopamine flows with curiosity, novelty, reward, fun and anything else that engages the imagination. This helps to lock in attention and close the gate on distraction. For a more in-depth investigation into practical neuroscience and learning, you can check out Melissa’s book on the subject.

We live in a Twitter world. Our kids can be interacting with three different screens at a time, having multiple chats going and listening to music while saying they are writing a paper! And although multi-tasking is a myth, most kids think they can do it successfully. Studies done by researchers at the University of Missouri in 2006 showed how adding in distraction impairs memory storage. In a big way.

What’s actually happening is that they are shifting focus and attention rapidly, albeit inefficiently. This has trained the brain to pay attention in short bursts and unfortunately made sustained listening to boring lectures or lessons downright torturous.

Without launching into a tirade about the nature of our education system and how, as John Medina puts it, in his amazing book, *Brain Rules*, “*If you wanted to create an education environment that was directly opposed to what the brain was good at doing, you probably would design something like a classroom*”, we will just say that our kids are swimming upstream.

Brain Games

Some other ways to keep the kids engaged include showing them how their brain codes things. There is a fun pattern in NLP called “mapping across sub modalities” where you take the inner template of one strategy and use it for another. It is the pattern that Melissa leans on for getting her taxes done, books edited and all the other things she has to do but doesn't really feel motivation for.

With teens especially you need a bit more to get them interested so this pattern accomplishes many things at once. We get the dopamine flowing, the brain learning, and curiosity piqued as kids learn about how their mind codes. And there is nothing more fascinating to teens than themselves!

You start by asking questions about something they love doing, something that they can easily focus on for hours. They usually mention computers, games, sports or their favorite books. Once you have it, you ask about the form their thinking takes. Ask them to point to where the image is in their mind and get the different features involved, by asking for specifics.

Here's an example:

Hyp: When you think of that game now, where's the image? Front and center? Slightly up? Down? To the left? Or right? How close?

Teen: The image? Um, it's right in front. Close to me.

Hyp: Is it a moving picture? Or a still shot?

Teen: Moving.

Hyp: In color or black and white?

Teen: Color...

Hyp: *Are you seeing through your own eyes? Or are you in the picture?*

Teen: *I'm just seeing the screen...as if I'm playing.*

Hyp: *Cool. And as you see that and imagine playing, how does it feel?*

Teen: *Easy...but exciting.*

Hyp: *And where do you feel that in your body?*

Teen: *It feels like energy moving down my arms.*

Hyp: *Great! Now look at me and shake it off. Good. When you think of studying for your test. Where is that picture?*

Teen: *Hmm, it's kind of down there to the right.*

Hyp: *And is it moving or still? Color or black and white?*

Teen: *It's a still shot. Kind of dark, not sure if it's black and white...but it's dark.*

Hyp: *And are you in the picture or seeing through your own eyes.*

Teen: *That's funny. I'm imagining myself hunched over at my desk...*

Hyp: *Okay. Shake it off. Look at me. Now, go back to playing that game...feel the energy moving down your arms...and now, here's the fun part. I'm going to take this dark image and send it way off into the distance. Imagine that image like a dot on the horizon...and in a moment I'm going to have you imagine bringing the image back like a sling shot and bring it right into the position of the game shot.*

So let's try it in slow motion first. Imagine that study image

moving way out into the distance where you can hop out of that image and bring it swooshing back, front and center, in a moving color image. Ready...go!

Teen: *That's weird.*

Hyp: *Yep. First time is a bit of a brain bender. Now imagine how good it's going to feel when you can study with focus, pass that test and feel focused whenever you want.*

Teen: *Yeah, that's gonna be a game changer.*

Hyp: *Ok, we are going to do it now, faster. You will imagine that dark image moving from down there, way out into the horizon, you'll imagine you jumping out of the picture as it comes slamming back into the game position right in front, center and in moving color. Go!*

Teen: *That one was easier.*

Hyp: *Yep. And it will get easier each time. So let's do it again faster. Go! Sending it way out...and whoosh! Right into the right position...and focus...feeling energy down your arms.*

Teen: *That feels better! You know, once I get into it, I can usually remember what I study...*

Hyp: *And one more time, so we can get you into it...and go!*

Teen: *Got it.*

Hyp: *And shake. Now. Imagine going home and sitting down to study. What are you noticing now?*

Teen: *It seems doable. It ain't no video game...but I feel like I can get it done.*

Hyp: *That's right. You can get it done. Check again. Imagine going home and sitting down to study.*

Teen: *Yep. I can do it. I almost feel like the faster I get to it, the closer it is to getting done.*

Hyp: *That's right.*

Now this process is designed to make stuff we procrastinate on more approachable. You probably aren't going to get a very excited emotional state. You aren't going to get someone jazzed to do taxes or paperwork but, by using the inner template the brain uses for motivation, you can make it more manageable or “doable” as this teen said.

Open Focus Brain

A fantastic little exercise we love can be used as an induction or a stand-alone practice at home. It comes from the work of Les Fehmi, whose book, *Open Focus Brain*, is full of great ideas to bring to your trance work. Melissa created this induction based on the idea of eliciting a synchronous alpha brain wave state, that's been shown to help create a more flexible brain. Fehmi uses these brain states to help kids with all types of attention issues.

We will include the basic suggestions here and would love for you to put down this book and take two to three minutes to play with this yourselves.

Start by having the kid or teen hold their hand about twelve inches in front of their face, palm facing in. Then you will begin by asking them to focus on all the space between all those fingers. Give them a few moments to allow their eyes to rest in that space. Then continue with...

Now, become more aware of the space between those fingers...blending with the space around that hand... becoming more aware...of the space between those fingers

blending with the space behind that hand... becoming even more aware...of all the space around that hand...that arm...blending with the space between your fingers...and your eyes...becoming more aware of the space between...breaths...

...the space between your fingers blending...with the space inside...that palm...becoming more aware of all the space between that hand and your face...and allowing the space between to expand...the space between that hand and your eyes...as you slowly allow...that hand to move down...while becoming more aware of the space between ...stretching...as you close your eyes...still...being aware of the space between your fingers...and your feet...becoming more aware of the space between thoughts...breaths...those two hands...becoming more aware of the space between...

From here you can begin layering suggestions for the changes they want. So it can be a fantastic induction. Most adults call it quite trippy. Or you can describe it to the kid as a way to take their brain to the gym. By allowing different regions of the brain to be stimulated by focusing on space instead of objects, you get a very interesting and relaxed state of mind and body. Try it. You'll like it.

State Dependent Learning

Many kids are brought to us because they can't seem to focus enough to study for tests. Although this could really be included in many of the other chapters, like anxiety, performance or habits, we include it here because it's often lumped in with ADD issues.

State dependent learning is a feature of the brain that comes into play in a few ways. One way is that when we are in a certain emotional state the brain sorts for like-minded states. So when

someone is depressed, all the mind can easily conjure up is depressed thoughts of the past and the future. It's as if each emotional state acts as a cognitive filter. This is why it's so important to dissociate from a negative state before looking for a solution.

Another feature that comes in useful for helping kids focus, study and retain information is to know that if they study in a particular state, it's easier to recall that information if the same state is triggered. In the book, *Brain Rules*, already quoted above, Medina gives a lecture in a room with cologne on the wall; when students were tested, the ones who were in a room with the cologne did significantly better.

Another past study that comes to mind was done with alcohol. They got subjects drunk and gave them a string of numbers and other things to remember. When they sobered up they were tested for recall and, as you can imagine, did abysmally. When the subjects were provided the same amount of tequila, they could recall so much more.

So, what does this mean for the kids we work with? Well, tequila isn't the answer. But we can create certain relaxed and focused states and give them a simple anchor they can use when studying and when being tested.

Just like in previous examples of copying and pasting, have the kid recall in vivid sensory detail what it's like when they are focused. We will usually ask about a subject that they do well in and take them through an experience of being calm and focused while taking a test they aced. If that option is not available then go for anything that they find engaging. A video game, or sport or a good blog will do.

Once they are reliving that, feeling calm and focused, have them put their thumb and fingertip together, take a deep breath in and think the word "focus". Then have them rehearse sitting down to study and putting thumb and fingertip together, take a deep breath in,

exhale and think “focus” and do the same for sitting down for the test. Rehearse this a few times to condition it in. You can take this to an even more effective level when you let the kid choose the “magic word”. We've had kids use some crazy words to enter a focus state and that's fine by us!

We like to then do a brief induction and mentally rehearse this some more, adding all the suggestions that they will be able to “*remember everything they need to remember...and every time they put their thumb and forefinger together they will feel a wave of calm and focus and will be able to recall everything they need to remember, feeling calm and focused...*”

Some kids choose to also add a scent. Our olfactory sense is the quickest conduit to our emotions and is a natural ally with hypnotic imagery. A child can have fun with their parent, going to hunt for an essential oil or scent that they like, then wearing it every time they study so that it becomes linked to the state of calm focus, another great anchor. Kids love ritual, so have fun helping them come up with some creative ones...

Additionally, utilize “place dependent learning” by helping kids create a space where they consistently study and do homework so that their brain associates that with focus and learning. Just by asking parents to set up an organized desk area for their kids will help create a ritualized place for learning. When you are working with a kid, elicit details about their study space so that you can refer to them in your session.

For younger kids we rehearse sitting in a focused state while imagining the teacher being as boring as the kid thinks they are. We shift into peripheral vision every time they feel the need to fidget and make it a game. For the kids that act out impulsively, we rehearse different situations and employ strategies for those moments. It's all brain training. The brain takes the shape of experience and learning to counter the typical strategies these kids have been using has an enormous impact.

We also want to mention emotional aspects and beliefs that you may want to address with kids. There is a stigma attached to being labeled. It effects every aspect of identity and plays out in all kinds of ways. We explain to kids and parents that every brain is different and not everyone was meant to conform to the norm. With teens we want to point out how the world evolves with the help of people who never quite fit the usual mold.

The good news is by teaching kids to rewire their brain you are showing them how malleable it all is. So this “disorder” they've been shackled with is something that changes along with the brain. Too many kids are told it is a problem that they will have to manage their whole lives, usually with medication (please don't get us started on THAT subject!) and that it's a fixed feature of their brain.

Think of what this does for self-esteem and identity issues. We always talk to older kids and teens about what they think this issue means to them and their future. Often, sessions are based around reframing limiting beliefs, changing emotions of shame and inadequacy and training the brain to focus. We help them to envision an extraordinary future to go with their extraordinary brain!

About the Authors



Melissa Tiers is the founder of The Center for Integrative Hypnosis with a private practice in New York City. She is an award winning author and an internationally renowned teacher of Integrative Hypnosis, Neuro-Linguistic Psychology, practical neuroscience and mental health coaching. Melissa is an instructor for the NGH and The International Association of Counselors and Therapists and an adjunct faculty

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