

Creating a happy marriage is possible and this site is dedicated to providing resources to help couples who want to stay together. By providing information about qualified marriage counseling, we hope to encourage couples to get the help they need. The site also features articles, other websites, books, and workshops which offer the tools needed to create happy, lasting marriages.



Does Hypnosis Have A Place In Your Marriage?

This is Episode number 36 of Stay Happily Married, "Hypnosis."

Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

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Lee Rosen: Hi. I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I have with me today our guest, Dr. Kathleen Connolly. Dr. Connolly holds an undergraduate and graduate degree in psychology, human services, counseling, and counselor education. She has worked with a broad array of clients including adults, adolescents, children, and families. Currently her practice serves young and middle, older adult populations, couples, and corporate clients. And interestingly, especially for the purposes of our program today, she has training in clinical hypnosis.

Welcome to the show, Kathleen.

Kathleen Connolly: Thank you for having me.

Lee Rosen: Well, I'm really glad you could be with us. You know, hypnosis is fascinating to me just from having -- like in college when they brought people in to do entertainment shows and all of that. I've always been intrigued by it. And I assume when we talk to you we're not going to be talking about making people cluck like a chicken on a stage or anything.

Kathleen Connolly: That's right.

Lee Rosen: Too bad, because that has always been one of the most entertaining things to me, but I guess we have to be serious.

Now, you are an expert in this topic but before we really jump into hypnosis and how it impacts saving marriages and all that, let me ask you about your practice a little bit. Your practice is located in Charlotte, North Carolina, is that correct?

Kathleen Connolly: That's correct.

Lee Rosen: And how long have you been practicing?

Kathleen Connolly: Well, I've been in psychology and mental health for over 15 years and I've been fortunate to have a private practice here in Charlotte, North Carolina for the last eight years.

Lee Rosen: Okay. And from the intro it sounds like you are seeing really the whole spectrum of people, just about everybody. Is that accurate?

Kathleen Connolly: It is, Lee. You know, the important thing for me to get across to listeners is that I have training in a wide variety of different treatment modalities and have worked with a lot of different people. My practice, Acumeans, my private practice in Charlotte, really does focus now more so on young, middle, and older adults and couples. And I also do a lot of career counseling, career coaching and business coaching. And so I do have experience with those younger groups like you mentioned, back in the old days, if you will. But primarily focusing on adult population right now, couples of course, and then also doing a lot of other different kinds of counseling and coaching.

Lee Rosen: Now, are you doing a lot of hypnosis work?

Kathleen Connolly: Indeed, yeah. Almost all of the clients that come and visit me, we do work hypnosis into the counseling process. It really is such a wonderful way of helping people develop their internal resources, and even on the most basic level helping them relax and calm themselves. And as a stress management technique, it's excellent. But then we can also use it therapeutically in the counseling process to help clients, like I say, grow those internal resources and help them develop some insights that may help them make some changes.

Lee Rosen: Now, are you finding that people that are coming to you -- I know you're known as an expert in the community for doing the hypnosis, but I'm wondering are people coming to you because they've tried other approaches to working on their issues and on their marriages and that just didn't work? Are you kind of a last resort for them or --

Kathleen Connolly: I see about 50/50. A lot of people that are coming for hypnosis may have been exposed to it in the past and either has or has not worked for them and they want to give it another try or they want to go ahead

and get back in to use those skills. And then certainly there are people that maybe have had an unfortunate experience working with a hypnotherapist who isn't trained properly, who doesn't have a license to practice, let's say, counseling or psychology or wasn't working with a practitioner that is able to help them without hypnosis. One of the rules that I was trained to keep in mind is that as a therapist you shouldn't treat anything with hypnosis that you wouldn't treat without using hypnosis.

So back to your earlier comment, it is a very serious technique and it is something that is really important to use with intentionality. We should know exactly why we would be using this technique as opposed to just using it willy-nilly because it sounds neat and it's the latest thing.

Lee Rosen: So you're saying about 50 percent of people have been trying other things before they even come in for hypnosis, right?

Kathleen Connolly: That's right.

Lee Rosen: So in terms of their marriages not working, what have they been trying? Are they doing marriage counseling and that sort of thing and it's not working?

Kathleen Connolly: I think so, yeah. A lot of people have been to other marriage counselors. Other people maybe have been doing individual counseling with the hope of that helping the marriage. I see that quite a bit. And sometimes people, quite frankly, they maybe have been going to counseling but they haven't been applying the techniques that they've been using. They haven't been doing the work consistently outside of counseling.

They may be reading books. They may be talking to other people about their marriage, about their concerns, and then what my hope is and what I usually try to convey to clients is that when you come to me I'm really going to challenge you to do the work. I don't want this to be another time where you don't have an experience of success and so I really try to contact that couple and really try to help them understand, hey, you know what? This is going to be your last counseling experience because this is going to be the one that works.

Lee Rosen: Right. So is that because hypnosis works or because they really commit at this point?

Kathleen Connolly: I think it has to be both, right? I mean, whatever I'm doing I need them on board as well. And so I try to be very direct and tell them that, hey, I'm here to help you and I want you doing a lot of work outside of

session. And some of that work, as you say, could very well be hypnotic work, taking a couple minutes out of their day; sitting quietly, whether it's with each other or just on their own; and using the hypnotic interventions, the self-hypnosis and the visualization exercises, to really help them access those resources and help them work on whatever it is they need to be working on.

Lee Rosen: Okay. So I want to really dig into what the hypnosis is all about. So I guess threshold question is, what can you do with hypnosis in terms of marriage? What problem can you solve for people?

Kathleen Connolly: I'll give you the best example I have for that. Sometimes we see as marriage counselors a dynamic called the distance or pursuer dynamic. And we might see other parent-child dynamics or other roles or, if you will, metaphors, patterns that are occurring in the relationship. Those kinds of patterns are reflective of anxiety and reactivity, a lack of impulse control. And so we may see people that get angry very quickly. We may see people that are very reactive; they jump to conclusions very quickly. They may be using emotional blackmail techniques. They may be unable to express those feelings or those beliefs.

And what hypnosis can do is really help people learn how to calm and sooth their anxiety, how to manage their impulse control, slowing down these interactions, noticing this is that same pattern. "This feels just like that other time we had this conversation. Let's take a timeout. What's really going on here?"

So hypnosis is a great way of accessing those resources that clients have forgotten to use. There was a time when maybe they didn't get as angry or they were not as impulsive. We want to take them back to that time and say, "Hey, come on. You have the ability to calm down and think about this." And hypnosis clears out all that conscious thought process about why they can't do that and all the barriers and all the reasons why they really have to keep being defensive and fight that point, and helps access a part of themselves that knows what's best for them and knows that they have the resources to just calm and sooth themselves and relax.

Lee Rosen: You know, it's fascinating listening to you explain it because I can hear that whole hypnosis thing -- you have that voice and that way of delivering your message that it's easy to imagine you hypnotizing someone, at least my layperson's imagination of that.

So what is it like? Someone comes into your office and you figure out, okay, this is an appropriate approach to helping them with what's

going on with them. How does it really work? How long does it take? How many sessions are we talking about?

Kathleen Connolly: Those are all great questions. The first session -- sometimes people will come for hypnosis proper. They will call me and say, "I'd like to come in to learn how to use hypnosis to help me do this or help me do that." Other times people are already in counseling with me and I weave the technique in, with their permission, and explain it to them. In either circumstance an assessment is the most important component, to really assess and evaluate this individual. What are they struggling with? What's going on? What are we dealing with? What really are the issues here?

And then what I do is I introduce the technique in a way to help them learn how to practice it on their own. So I might ask this individual or this couple to just allow the eyes to close and take some deep breaths and just follow the pace of your breathing. And as you do that, you notice that you become more relaxed, and so on and so on. And what I'm describing when I'm telling you that is the beginning of the process, which is typically what we call an induction.

So people can expect to practice in that first assessment session or the first time that we use hypnosis in the session. And I really help them understand practice makes perfect. So if you would just sit quietly and just watch your breathing, etc. So they can expect that.

They can also expect to ask me questions about, "How would this help me? Why would we use this technique?" And of course those answers are going to be based on what it is they need to be working on in counseling. "How would this help me sooth my anxiety?"

Well, perhaps there's a part of you that would like to help you manage that anxiety. And I would just be suggesting to that part of you, "Wouldn't it be nice if you felt less and less anxious? And wouldn't it be nice if you were able to calm your anxiety and take a deep breath?" Those would be the kinds of things they'd be expecting to hear.

Most important thing to communicate, every client is unique and special and so I want to make sure that I don't over-generalize my description as I'm speaking with you today. And clients know that this is a customized technique. So while there's some general things about hypnosis, I want to delivery a customized and really unique program for them so that they can take it on their own, outside of session, and use it.

They can expect to remember everything about the experience. They can expect to feel calm and relaxed. They can have all different kinds

of experiences and all different kinds of emotions and feelings and sensations and that's all going to be really unique to them and unique to what it is that they're wanting to work on.

Lee Rosen: That's fascinating. Now, a lot of what you talk about when you talk about hypnosis sounds somewhat like meditation training to me. Is there a distinction or are they overlapping or how do those relate to one another?

Kathleen Connolly: Yeah. You know, that's another great question. It depends on who you talk to. Some people find that meditation and hypnosis have a similar feel in terms of mindfulness and allowing the mind to drift or allowing the mind to focus. They may have the same internal experience with their breathing or how their body feels.

A lot of people that practice meditation and have maybe from that Buddhist perspective or transcendental meditation will say, no, it's not the same as hypnosis. And they would disagree. So there's some different schools of thought.

My belief is, whatever it is that you're doing that's helping you, I'm not really frankly concerned what you're calling it. If it feels like meditation to you, let's call it meditation. If it feels hypnotic, if it feels more like a trance experience, let's call it that. But there are some similarities in the quality of the experience. Meditation will tend to be focused maybe more on a specific area, thoughts without a thinker, if you will, to empty the mind completely. Whereas hypnosis, we're trying to access a level of consciousness that is suggestive, that we can make direct or indirect suggestions to, and that's in part how it would differ. But again, those internal sensations would be similar.

Lee Rosen: Right. Now, you've talked about anxiety and impulse control and it's obvious to me that having out of control anxiety or having an inability to control your impulses will make it very difficult to have a successful marriage. And it all hooks up for me how meditation can help with both the anxiety and/or the impulse control. Are there other things related to the marriage that you use hypnosis to treat?

Kathleen Connolly: Oh, of course. Any time we're talking about a marriage counseling modality we're talking about patterns and interrelationships. And so there may be certain things that are happening in the relationship that are based in family of origin, and sometimes we can use hypnosis to help bring about those insights. We can use hypnosis to help clients get a sense of how they want to be in the future; they can visualize, perhaps, how they want to be behaving with their spouse, how they'd like to see themselves in the marriage. We can use it in that way.

Depression. Any other kind of mood disorder or, like we said anxiety before, to help with negative thinking, to help with those thoughts that seem so automatic. Self-criticism. A lot of times I will teach clients hypnosis in conjunction with John Gottman's work and he talks a lot about the four horsemen of criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling.

So we can wrap hypnotic techniques around those to disinvite those concepts or those patterns in the relationship. So it really is getting the clients on board too that, "Wouldn't it be nice? What do you see in the future?" And hypnosis is a right brain technique, right? So you're really helping them use some visualization skills as well. "See you guys sitting calmly and talking about this conflict."

Lee Rosen: Right. Very interesting. Now, do you ever do hypnosis for both partners in a marriage or are you usually only seeing one of the partners?

Kathleen Connolly: Oh, I'll do it with both. Absolutely.

Lee Rosen: And do you do it simultaneously, both together?

Kathleen Connolly: Sure. Sure.

Lee Rosen: Wow. Interesting.

Kathleen Connolly: Yeah. Why not? I mean, they're there.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Kathleen Connolly: And one thing that I'll tell people is, "When you're checked out of your relationship, when you're checked out of your marriage --" and people know what that means. They're not shocked when they hear me say that. When you're not showing up or when you are so impulsive or anxious, you're already in a trance. So you're kind of walking around in what's called this kind of -- your own unique couple's trance. And that can be a trance of criticism; it can be a trance of contempt, of stonewalling; it can be a trance of just not being emotionally available; a trance of emotional blackmail; old family or origin trances. And so you're already checked out. We're going to wake you up and we're going to show you how to connect in a different way.

Lee Rosen: Right. Now, I have no idea -- when I was in college and I saw the dance like a chicken hypnosis thing on the stage, I have no idea whether that was real or -- who knows? But obviously whatever was going on there happened in a hurry. Do you see things with your patients happen very quickly because of hypnosis?

Kathleen Connolly: Sure. I mean, one of the things that we know is that when we are accessing that suggestible part of the mind or part of the individual, that that part of us is so open and it isn't blocked by, again, those negative thoughts or all of these social constructions about the way we should be, the way we must be, the way we ought to be. And so sometimes we will see people making improvements maybe a little more quickly when they're using hypnosis because they're freer.

The other part of the question you're asking, Lee, might be, boy they seem to get into trance very quickly. What is that about? And sometimes there are people that are just more suggestible than others, that are more hypnotically talented. And comedians and lay hypnotists are good at picking those people out.

The thing that's important for people to know if they're listening to this is that all hypnosis is a choice. So whether you're in my office or you're at a comedy club, hypnosis is always a choice. And if you are open to it, it will happen. You will make it happen. If you're not, it won't. So no one can hypnotize you without your consent; that's how strong your mind is, that's how strong your will is.

And so when you're open to the experience -- and typically when you see these comedians they'll pick people out and then you'll see them ask people to leave. "You go down. You go down. You're not going to be in this group. We only need you over here." It's because they're pretty in tune with who's going to work with them and who's more willing to go along with the program.

Lee Rosen: Right. So they're as good at doing it as they are at picking the right people to do it with, really. They're probably not as good at doing it.

Kathleen Connolly: I think so, yes.

Lee Rosen: Right. That's fascinating. I wonder -- you've said a lot that makes this whole thing feel much safer, that no one can be hypnotized if they really aren't okay with it. So I guess there are not stories of people using this practice to harm their patients. You wouldn't really hear of that, I suppose. Is that accurate?

Kathleen Connolly: Well, I'm afraid that can't be accurate. If you think of hypnosis not as a therapy, per se, but as an intervention, as a technique, like any other technique or any other intervention, if it's in the wrong hands it can be misused. And so it would be wrong for me to say that, oh, no, nobody's ever gotten into trouble using this technique. There probably are some circumstances where it's been used inappropriately or the individual hasn't been trained well. That's my real concern about lay

hypnotherapy, people that are not trained in a healthcare discipline, like I had said before.

When you're using hypnosis you're really with another part of the person and if you don't have the skill set and the acumen to be able to hold that, even if that person was a willing participant, you may not be able to process the experience. Sometimes people will have what's called an abreaction, which means that's a response that one would not expect. And if they come out of the trance and they feel uncomfortable you have to have a really good counseling skill set psychology background to be able to help that individual process that experience. That is a disproportionate experience.

Let's say most people will have a wonderful experience with hypnosis. Most people will enjoy it and it will help them, as we said, harness all these wonderful resources that people usually have but they lose sight of. But they should be very astute and very much consumers of this technique and make sure that the person delivering it knows what they're doing it and is accountable to someone else other than them, like a licensing board or a state regulation system.

Lee Rosen: Right. So cover all your bases and check out the person that you're considering.

Kathleen Connolly: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Lee Rosen: Now, obviously, if I'm in Charlotte and I'm listening to this program then I'm coming to you. But if I'm not in Charlotte and I'm looking around for someone to use hypnosis to help me with issues, is there any sort of a way to go out and find somebody and know you're getting somebody that's good at this?

Kathleen Connolly: Absolutely. I'm so glad you asked that. People should log onto the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis; it's asch.net. We call it ASCH. It is the flagship organization for clinical hypnosis. They have a wonderful referral website, lots of great information about hypnosis and people all over the country, and even internationally.

The difference between ASCH and being certified through ASCH is this. People can only join ASCH or be certified by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis if they are licensed in their discipline. So for example, myself as a counselor, a psychologist. A dentist, lots of physicians do great hypnotherapy. Clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, etc., we all have to have licenses to practice, right? So ASCH says to the world, we are the organization that takes professionals who are licensed in their discipline.

And so a certification like I have through ASCH is what people should be looking for. And they can go on that website and they can click on Resources or Find a Certified Professional and they can put in there the state that they live in or the town they live in and they'll get a list of professionals. And they can even -- let's say they wanted hypnosis for smoking or hypnosis for depression or they have dental anxiety. They can find somebody in their area who is an ASCH member, who's been trained by ASCH and who is certified. And that is the best resource to use if you're outside of Charlotte.

Lee Rosen: And so that's asch.net.

Kathleen Connolly: That's right.

Lee Rosen: We will put a link to that in the show notes at stayhappilymarried.com. I appreciate that.

Now, you mentioned smoking, dental anxiety. What else do you see people using hypnosis for?

Kathleen Connolly: Public speaking, test anxiety. I use a lot of hypnosis for people with insomnia, sleep types of issues, weight management, stress management. If you think of it in terms of a continuum from behavioral issues or problems like smoking, all the way to maybe deeper issues like we talked about; on the marital end you're going to see things maybe run a little bit below that behavior in terms of maybe it being a family of origin piece or there being some deeper patterns that need to be addressed.

So there definitely is that continuum, but there are a wide range of issues that people come to me for. And sometimes hypnosis actually helps them understand, "Ah, this is what I need to be working on. This would be useful for me to be talking about in counseling."

Lee Rosen: Now, you mentioned early on in the program that your practice is called Acumeans. What is the origin of that name?

Kathleen Connolly: Thanks for asking that. Acumeans is the word that I developed to reflect the importance of knowledge and meaning in our lives. The more knowledge we have, the more meaning we can grow and develop. And the more meaning we have, the more wellness and well being and the more presence of health in our lives can be achieved.

Lee Rosen: Okay. I appreciate you explaining that.

Well, I'm really excited about not only all the many things that hypnosis can help with, but it had never occurred to me that hypnosis

could be a big help in making a marriage work. And you've explained it very well and it sounds like a very valuable tool, so I appreciate you joining us and explaining all that for us today. Thank you so much.

Kathleen Connolly: Well, thank you so much and I really appreciate the time. It's a wonderful technique, it's a wonderful skill and I'm always happy to be talking about hypnosis.

Lee Rosen: Well, a big thank you to Dr. Kathleen Connolly for joining us today. I want to remind you of a couple of things that she said. One is that her website is at acumeans.com. I would suggest that you check out the website, a lot of good stuff there. Dr. Connolly also has some CDs that she has done on the use of hypnosis on stress, weight loss, smoking. All of those CDs are available at signaturemedia.us, and I will put a link to that in the show notes as well.

I had really never thought of hypnosis being used in this way and so I'm pretty excited about it. I hope that you have learned something today and that maybe it will be helpful to you as you work things out and make your marriage even better.

Thank you so much for joining us today and I hope that you will come back and listen in next week. In the meantime, if you have comments about this show or any of the other episodes I would love to hear from you. We have a listener comment line set up for you to phone in and leave a message at (919) 256-3083. Or, if you would prefer, send an e-mail to us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com.

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

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