

Finally a way to overcome your driving test nerves...



**Harmony4Life
Hypnotherapy and Coaching
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Claire Paul is an accredited Clinical Hypnotherapist and Coach. She is a member of the British Psychological Society (BPS) Special Group in Coaching Psychology and the Clinical and Therapeutic Hypnosis Association (CTHA).

Claire specialises in helping people to pass their driving test by preventing nerves from interfering with their test performance. Following a stint of training to be a driving instructor but finding nerves prevented her from passing the advanced driving test she trained to be a hypnotherapist and has gone on to help people overcome test nerves.

Claire says “I may not be a hypnotherapist today if I had known hypnotherapy had the power to calm driving test nerves when I was training to be a driving instructor as this would have undoubtedly helped me through my advanced driving test!” Claire sees that as a blessing in disguise because failing her advanced test twice due to nerves and being unable to finance further tests meant she had to stop and think about whether she really wanted to become a driving instructor.

It was at that point she realised she would rather train as a hypnotherapist and later found she could use this to help people use the power of their minds to pass their test. She also helps people who experience a fear of driving after passing their test. Some people suffer with anxiety and stress every time they get in their car, which often leads them to avoid driving where possible.

Claire’s company, Harmony4Life, aims to help people improve their lives using hypnotherapy and coaching and is based on the belief that anyone can do anything if they put their mind to it. Claire says “people may not understand how these tools are used and their benefits. These techniques are completely safe and truly effective in improving the quality of people’s personal and professional lives through an exciting journey of self-discovery and empowerment.

Hypnotherapy synchronises the conscious and subconscious mind so they are in line with each other. Coaching takes a holistic view of life and ensures different areas of people’s lives are in line with what they really want and need. Together these tools are effective for a wide range of issues including stopping smoking, stress, anxiety, fears and phobias, insomnia, building confidence, improving relationships, enhancing performance, weight and pain management.

Driving test anxiety, fear and stress often develop more and more as the test approaches due to anticipation of what the driving test will be like and possible mistakes people may make. Being nervous is normal when taking any test or exam, in fact this can enhance your performance.

However, just before your driving test you may start to doubt whether you have the skills necessary to pass, even though your driving instructor putting you forward for the test indicates that you have reached a suitable standard. In fact you know you can drive well, however as soon as faced with the test you may feel this ability abandons you.

Based on personal experience, Claire says, “this can be hugely frustrating as you know you deserve to pass and are competent enough to perform at the standard required”. You may even be so anxious that your sleeping patterns are disturbed leading up to the test, so that on the day you are just not functioning as you normally would.

In your mind you may go through a number of things if you are not able to sleep. You may even start to think about people you know who ‘passed first time’ and worry about telling your friends and family if you fail. If you failed your test previously you may feel under even more pressure in the next test and this will probably include financial pressure.

The following are symptoms of driving test nerves:

- Feeling stressed, fearful and anxious in the period leading up to the test
- A feeling that you just can’t remember anything during the theory test
- A dry mouth, butterflies and nausea
- Physical shaking or trembling
- Concern about following the examiner's instructions correctly
- Loss of confidence in your ability to drive

These symptoms are often related to lack of confidence, poor self esteem, failure expectation and a basic fear of losing control when under pressure. In extreme cases people may continually avoid booking their test.

The Sunday Times (February 26, 2006) stated “its official: nerves really do make people fail their driving test. Those who fail are almost twice as anxious and have faster heart rates than those who pass. Researchers from Liverpool John Moores University found that nerves brought on by a fear of the examiner and of perceived failure in the eyes of friends or family can lead to a collapse in performance, a phenomenon they term “choking”. In one test it was found that the heart rate of those who passed was less than 120 beats per minute while those of failure beat at 140.”

Increased heart rate is part of the bodies' way of preparing for 'fight' or 'flight'. When a person becomes angry or frightened, the adrenal glands release large amounts of adrenalin into the blood. This increases the strength and rate of the heartbeat and raises the blood pressure. It can also cause unpleasant physical symptoms such as shaking and sweating. This is the bodies' way of using the excess adrenalin that it doesn't need for 'fight' or 'flight'. You can help reduce the unpleasant side effects by using up this excess adrenaline through physical activity.

THE SECRET TO PASSING YOUR DRIVING TEST

Passing you driving test depends on three things:

1. Being fully prepared
2. Being focused and positive
3. Remaining calm and in control

Information on each of these follows below.

1. Being fully prepared

Your driving lessons should fully prepare you so that you know what to expect in your test. If you feel that you are not fully prepared or confident enough, be proactive and find other ways of doing this. Here are some tips:

- Get additional practice where possible by asking your family and/or friends for support
- Identify your skills/knowledge gaps and ask your instructor questions related to these
- Go to your local library or book shop and find books on learning to drive
- Use learner driver forums as much as possible, e.g. <http://www.drivertrainingtoday.co.uk/forum/index.php>

2. Being focused and positive

Coaching helps focus your mind on the goal of passing your driving test and to overcome any barriers to success. Where possible the root cause of any barriers to passing your test will be addressed, e.g. past experiences leading to lack of confidence. By focusing your mind the RAS (Reticular Activating System- a cluster of brain cells), will filter information consistent with the goal of passing your driving test.

Coaching can identify thinking patterns, values and beliefs and how you can best use these, or change your programming, in order to pass your test. If self limiting beliefs are affecting your confidence Claire can help you to replace them with more positive beliefs. This is crucial in developing a positive mental attitude and believing in yourself. Henry Ford said "if you think you can, or you think you can't, you're absolutely right".

3. Remaining calm and in control

It's essential to relax and remain calm under pressure. This is demonstrated by the test reported in the Sunday Times which showed that the heart rate of those who passed was slower than those who failed. Hypnotherapy is very relaxing and calming and helps to control heart rate. It works by tapping into the subconscious mind, which stores emotions, fears and anxiety and is responsible for all your bodily functions, including your heart rate and hormone production.

Using hypnotherapy you can overcome any fear, stress and anxiety associated with passing your driving test, increase confidence and restore feelings of control. The driving test can then be tackled with new levels of calmness and self assurance. Claire uses deep relaxation techniques, self hypnosis, visualization and hypnoanalysis. These techniques really can make the difference on the day and help you to pass your driving test as demonstrated by the following client testimony.

Client testimony

“I was happy with Claire's initial consultation, as I felt she asked enough questions to understand the nature of my fear of driving tests. Also, before beginning any hypnosis she explained what would happen and if I was happy to continue.

I always felt like Claire listened to my answers or my feedback and thought carefully how to adapt techniques to suit me throughout our sessions. For example, I had a difficulty visualising situations during hypnosis. I was pleased with the approach Claire took to this problem, including using a questionnaire on thinking styles to see whether any of my other senses other than vision could be used during hypnosis.

I had felt incredibly (and incapacitatingly) nervous both during my mock driving test and my penultimate driving lesson. Nerves demonstrated themselves physically, for example, my feet would shake uncontrollably over the controls, and also mentally, as I was unable to assess situations on the road clearly. All this was nerves rather than a problem with driving as my driving had been fine, except in the run up to the test. I had failed my test 5 times over the years.

Both in my final driving lesson and the test itself I felt much calmer and more relaxed than before. In particular, during my driving test, there were only a couple of times where I felt my nerves at all, and even then they felt under control.

I did feel the adrenaline which is normal when you're in a situation where you want to prove yourself, but instead of being incapacitated, I was able to give my best performance. I passed my driving test after only a few sessions with Claire and I do believe that these sessions helped considerably, both in making me calmer and giving me the self-belief I needed to pass.

I am very happy to recommend Claire. She was professional, tailored her approach for me and created an environment where I was both comfortable discussing the background to my problem, and where I trusted her fully (which is important when you're allowing someone to put you in a hypnotised state!).”

Claire's top tip

Breathing steady, rhythmically down to your abdomen is crucial for controlling fear, anxiety and stress. By doing this your heart rate and blood pressure remain stable, you will get more oxygen to your brain and relax your muscles.

MORE ABOUT HYPNOTHERAPY

How does it feel to be hypnotised?

During hypnotherapy you may experience various physiological and biological changes; your legs and arms may feel particularly heavy as if they weigh more than normal, or light as if they are floating. You may experience a tingling sensation in them or sometimes they may feel as if they are not there any more. You may be aware of your heartbeat slowing down and your breathing becoming shallower. Sometimes the stomach can start to gurgle and be quite noisy.

How does hypnotherapy work?

Hypnotherapy can be used to address the root cause of an issue and can change beliefs which define our attitudes, outlook and behaviour. The emphasis of hypnotherapy is goal orientated and allows you to focus your attention internally, to enable you to take control of feelings, behaviours, habits and self-image.

You can access untapped potential and quickly create new associations, patterns of thinking and behaving. This is very exciting because in this state of mind negative beliefs can be reversed to positive, strong and life changing beliefs. We know now, how much a belief can affect the outcome of our lives. A negative belief can easily hold you back from the things other people do everyday and a positive belief can powerfully give you the ability to overcome any obstacle, exceeding even your own expectations of a happy and successful life.

To help explain how this works it is best to break down the following definition of Hypnosis:

“Hypnosis is a state of mind in which the critical factor of the human (conscious mind) is bypassed and selective thinking is established.” (Dave Elman)

The critical factor of the conscious mind will block and refuse new information if this is in conflict with information or a belief in the subconscious mind. Thus, hypnosis is used to relax the conscious mind and bypass the critical factor, which opens the door to the subconscious mind. Just simple conscious thought is not enough to reach the subconscious mind and make the changes that you would like.

Selective thinking is established when new positive suggestions are accepted by the subconscious mind wholeheartedly. This happens when you like the suggestions you are given and feel they will work for you, which is why it is important to get a good understanding of what you really want.

If you didn't like a suggestion or this was against your moral code of ethics you simply would not accept that suggestion. This explains why coaching compliments hypnotherapy so well, as suggestions can be individually tailored to clients' needs and will therefore be that much more powerful. For example, selective thinking may be established with a client who has requested hypnotherapy for pain relief through a suggestion such as "if you continue to see yourself playing football you will feel no discomfort whatsoever". The client will experience complete anaesthesia, as long as they continue to focus on playing football and accept the suggestion they have been given.

What evidence is there to prove that hypnotherapy really works?

Research continues to reflect that hypnotherapy can be a very powerful trigger given the right conditions, such as clients' commitment and motivation for change. When a client feels comfortable with their therapist they will benefit from increased relaxation and the effects of hypnotherapy can be astonishing.

When hypnotherapy is used to replace negative beliefs and old information with positive beliefs/information this can have a profound impact on attitudes, outlook and behaviours. As you can imagine these results can be life changing and explains the success of hypnotherapy as demonstrated by this quote:

"There is more scientific evidence for hypnotherapy than any other complimentary therapy...by using hypnosis people can perform amazing feats of willpower and self-healing" (Health Education Authority)

Which? 2002, reported the results of a meta-analysis of 18 controlled trials which suggest that hypnotherapy can reinforce the effects of cognitive behavioural psychotherapy for conditions including high blood pressure, insomnia and anxiety. Which? also stated that other studies indicate that hypnotherapy can help with weight loss, chronic fatigue syndrome and headaches.

Suggestion therapy and coaching

Suggestion therapy can help you create new patterns in your life. It refers to positive suggestions that are given to clients, whilst they are experiencing hypnosis, to suggest that something will happen or is happening. For example, 'your circulation is improving and you can feel your hands becoming warmer and warmer' or 'when you wake up you will feel energised and better than you did before'. This kind of therapy has received criticism as it only deals with the symptoms, rather than the cause.

However, using the positive, goal focused approach of coaching in conjunction with suggestion therapy results in tailored hypnotherapy, which is more powerful. This is the result of suggestion therapy being much more in line with clients' goals, beliefs, symptoms and any personal barriers that may be holding them back.

Suggestions therapy and coaching can help you achieve goals such as weight loss, improving relationships, career progression or anything else. However, for deeper rooted psychological problems suggestion therapy and coaching may be combined with hypnoanalysis for more powerful results (see below).

Visualisation

During hypnotherapy visualisation will be used to ensure you have a positive picture of yourself in your driving test. When you imagine yourself performing perfectly at anything you physiologically create the same neural patterns in your brain that would be generated by actual performance.

Hence, visualisation is extremely effective in training our minds and creating neural patterns in our brain which teach our muscles to do exactly what we want them to do, which enhances performance (Porter, 1990). Roure (1998) found six specific autonomic nervous system (ANS) responses that correlated with visualisation and improved performance. Roure suggested that visualisation may help in the construction of schema (mental plans to guide action, interpret information or solve problems) which can be reproduced, without even thinking, in actual practice.

Hypnoanalysis

For the person who needs more help with driving test stress, fear and anxiety hypnoanalysis can help greatly. If you find it hard to change feelings, behaviour or emotional reactions to certain things through conscious effort and willpower, underlying conflicts in the subconscious mind may be the cause.

Often old feelings such as shame, anger, jealousy, hurt or guilt have been stored in the subconscious mind as a result of past experiences. The conscious is not usually aware of these repressed feelings so they simply remain there and have a continuous influence over present feelings, beliefs and behaviour. However, hypnoanalysis can tap into the subconscious mind to change this.

Psychological and emotional issues can be treated successfully by hypnoanalysis. This includes phobias (claustrophobia, agoraphobia, etc.), anxiety/panic attacks, migraine/headaches, sexual problems, severe eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia), stutters and depression. In line with hypnotherapy being a 'brief therapy' this method 'speeds up' the analysis process, getting results in a matter of weeks which can take more than "1,000 hours of conventional analysis". Hypnoanalysis can take between 1 to 12 weekly sessions, depending on clients' needs.

Hypnoanalysis facilitates the recall of past events whilst clients are hypnotised (also known as 'free association'). It focuses on the cause and effect of emotional and psychological issues and is used to identify the original cause of a particular issue. Behavioural issues or physical symptoms are often linked to an emotionally significant past event which is hidden from the conscious mind.

For instance as children many of us have faced events which produced emotions that we found difficult, if not impossible, to deal with. The subconscious may have filed the memory of the event away or this may be perfectly clear in someone's mind. However, the emotion which is associated with the event is usually locked deeply within the subconscious, triggering fears and anxieties, which often take over someone's life.

For example, a phobia may develop if the emotion is externalised and directed towards an object or behaviour. Alternatively physical symptoms may result, such as eczema, migraine, high blood pressure, a stammer or IBS (irritable bowel syndrome). Any issue or condition which may be the result of underlying anxiety, caused by a repressed memory can be helped by hypnoanalysis. This includes depression, sexual problems, low self-esteem, nervous disorders, tinnitus, fears and phobias.

Using hypnoanalysis I can work with you to re-examine past events and release any associated emotions. It may take a few weeks before memories below conscious awareness come to the surface through hypnoanalysis. I will guide clients through hypnoanalysis to help them recall events and emotions leading back to the initial event. Eventually catharsis will occur where the originating cause of the problem and the associated emotions are found and released. As an adult you can use your existing knowledge and wisdom to view these memories from a different perspective, which helps release them from the subconscious. This results in long-term/permanent relief of the symptom.

To find out more at NO COST and with NO OBLIGATION please contact Claire Paul...