

# Harry the Hypno-potamus

## More Metaphorical Tales for Children

Volume 2



Linda Thomson PhD MSN CPNP

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# Introduction

The second book of *Harry the Hypno-potamus* tales contains metaphors that deal with a variety of physical and behavioral problems. Embedded in many of the metaphors are hypnotherapeutic techniques that can be used as part of a comprehensive approach to diagnosing and treating certain disorders.

Reading a child the first story, “Harry Tells Haley and Conor about Hypnosis,” is a wonderful way to introduce a child to hypnosis and the power of imagination. Two metaphors in the book—a tale about a loon, and another about a hippopotamus and a tortoise—are based on real animals and life events. The rest of the events and their metaphors take place in the imaginary Ashland Zoo. There Dr. Dan, a wise and wonderful veterinarian, cares for all the animals. The animal character in each story has a physical or emotional problem, and learns specific hypnotherapeutic techniques and self-regulatory strategies to help master it. Most of the stories contain interesting zoological facts about the animal in the metaphor.

A story may be shared with a child who has that particular problem, or the techniques embedded in the metaphor can be applied to other situations, and adapted to other patients and clients. The developmental age of the child must always be considered. Some of the stories may fascinate a young child, yet contain techniques that are more appropriate for an older one. Some of the stories contain hypnotic scripts. In hypnosis, pacing, leading, cadence, rhythm, and vocal inflections are all important.

## Pediatric Hypnosis

Imagining and pretending are integral to children’s play. Hypnosis is a natural extension of employing fantasy to change or avoid an unpleasant situation, gratify unmet needs, remember the past, or invent the future. Hypnotherapeutic work enhances and strengthens the child’s natural inclinations toward fantasy and creativity, exploration, and forming social relationships. Children strive to achieve self-efficacy and self-mastery, and they are generally receptive to hypnotic tools that will help them experience success.

The therapeutic alliance, or rapport, between child and clinician is critically important to the success of a hypnotic intervention. The child must feel safe, comfortable, and confident that he can trust the professional. Other important variables include the child’s motivation to change, his expectation of success, and his active participation in the process.

## Metaphorical Approaches

Throughout the ages, in all cultures around the world, parents have used stories to teach their children important life lessons. Children love stories and using their imagination. Our memories of childhood are filled with parables about compassion, courage and wisdom, stories of honesty and industriousness, and tales of mythical heroes and heroines. “The Little Engine That Could” and “The Hare and the Tortoise” taught us about perseverance. “The Ugly Duckling” taught us how deceptive appearances can be.

By using symbolic language and characters, metaphors convey their meaning indirectly. They open up a world of possibilities and experiences, stimulate curiosity, and expand horizons.

Symbolic language implies something more than its obvious or immediate meaning. The right brain processes symbolic language, subjective and sensory sensations; hypnosis is a right brain phenomenon that cultivates imagination. Metaphor may well be the language of the right brain, and it can be used very effectively in hypnotherapy.

A hypnotherapist uses metaphors to communicate simultaneously with both the conscious and the unconscious minds. The conscious mind processes the words, the narrative, and the ideas, while the therapeutic message is slipped into the unconscious via implication and connotation. The unconscious mind explores the broader meaning and the personalized relevance that gives the metaphor its potency. When a clinician skilled in hypnotherapy uses metaphors, the moral of the story is never explained, as they are in Aesop's fables. The impact of the tale is much more powerful when the individual figures out the personal relevance and meaning for herself.

The goal of the metaphor is to expand human consciousness through a right brain encounter linking emotion, symbolic language, and life experience.

In the 1960s, neurosurgeons Vogel and Bogen performed an unprecedented experimental surgical procedure on a patient with epilepsy: they intentionally severed the corpus callosum, the nerve pathways between the two hemispheres of the brain. As a result, scientists discovered that the right and left sides of the brain each has a unique way of handling information.

Although the two brain hemispheres receive information cooperatively, each has its individual style of dealing with what it receives.

For example, the left brain works logically and literally on the sequential decoding of the printed word as the right brain simultaneously processes language in a holistic, implicative, and imagistic fashion. In other words, the left brain arranges all the puzzle pieces in order, while the right brain interprets the picture created by the separate pieces. While the left brain processes literal meaning, the right brain uses implication based on life experience to understand the whole picture. Generating imagery and gleaning the meaning of a story are right brain functions.

Metaphor appears to be the language of the right brain. This hemisphere is more involved in interpreting subjective and sensory experiences. Therefore, when communication is metaphorical, the right hemisphere is activated. Since psychosomatic symptoms are mainly generated by right brain functions, psychosomatic illness may be a right brain expression.

The metaphor allows a hypnotherapist to communicate symbolically with the unconscious mind. Because the right hemisphere mediates both symptomatology and metaphorical meaning, metaphorical approaches to therapy may be much less time-intensive. It is the right brain that comprehends metaphor; using metaphors in hypnosis may be a means of communicating directly with the right brain in its own language.

Using metaphors in hypnosis can bring about positive change. A therapeutic suggestion may not be obvious to the listener because it is so cleverly entwined and embedded in the story that she is unconsciously influenced to effect change without being consciously admonished to do so. As a result, the child may experience a sense of accomplishment and greater self-confidence. Metaphors may expose a child to new possibilities, new perspectives, and differing philosophies. Because they are subjectively experienced, metaphors help to bypass resistance. The child views the problem as something that is

happening to somebody else; therefore, she does not feel personally threatened.

Inputting a positive message to the unconscious is only one function of the metaphor. They also replenish the soul. Because metaphors are non-threatening, they often engage and enhance empowerment, causing children to stretch their minds, broaden their horizons, and develop wisdom. By altering the individual's usual way of thinking, metaphors help to change his patterns of behavior.

Restating a child's problem in a non-threatening metaphor provides the patient with a different view of the situation. Reframing helps him to take charge of mastering or resolving the problem. In reframing, the facts of a situation or an event remain the same, but the way a child views or conceptualizes the situation changes, thereby altering the entire meaning. Sometimes it is necessary for the child to use other senses, or perceptions different from the ones he would ordinarily use to experience success. Metaphorical approaches encourage the child's unconscious mind to develop novel ways to overcome limitations.

Children love stories; they love to imagine and pretend. Hypnotherapeutic work enhances and strengthens a child's natural strivings toward exploration, social relationships, fantasy, and creativity. Cultivating a child's imagination through hypnotic metaphors is not only appealing, it is effective.

The metaphors in this book can ignite a child's creative imagination. Very young children may not need to figure out the meaning of the metaphor; rather, they immerse themselves in the fanciful tale and become intimately connected to the sensory experience. The child's simplistic and intuitive grasp of situations allows her to be open to the symbolic dimension and diversion of the experience. When a child is fully immersed in the story, her personal internal negative dialogue may be suppressed, and new possibilities can flourish. The

child can make a personal connection with the character's situation or problem. By recognizing the personal relevance of the teaching tale, the child may discover a solution to her problem, thus enhancing her self-esteem and self-mastery.

The use of metaphors in hypnotherapy is certainly not limited to children. In their book *Therapeutic Metaphors for Children and the Child Within*, Mills and Crowley discuss metaphor's potential for creative reframing and unconscious learning in people of all ages. Most adults associate storytelling with pleasant childhood memories. According to Nick Owen in *The Magic of Metaphor*, "Stories connect the past with the present, and project both past and present into the future. Connecting between times and contexts, between ideas and concepts, between behaviors and values, stories enable the listeners to review and anticipate thought and action."

Listening to therapeutic tales effortlessly takes the individual into his inner world, stimulating unconscious restructuring, evoking his own solution to problems, and activating forces for change and healing. The metaphor's creative force can stimulate each person's unique inner processes, abilities, and resources. Using metaphor and helping the patient to create his own therapeutic tales can be an incredibly powerful tool in hypnosis.

## Anxiety

The most commonly occurring mental disorder in children is anxiety. This disorder may have a specific cause, or it can be more generalized,

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Mills, Joyce C., and Crowley, Richard J. *Therapeutic Metaphors for Children and The Child Within*. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1986.

Owen, Nick. *The Magic of Metaphor*. Carmarthen, UK: Crown House Publishing, 2001

without an objective focus. Anxiety results from a real or perceived danger, or a threat to safety. Some anxiety is appropriate, necessary, and universal. It is a normal protective mechanism that heightens awareness and the ability to react to danger or a threatening situation. The difference between appropriate anxiety and anxiety as a mental disorder is a matter of degree.

Some children live in a state of hyper-arousal which can result in physical symptoms such as tachycardia, shortness of breath, dizziness, tremulousness, and difficulty concentrating. Others may experience sleep and gastrointestinal disturbances, headaches or rashes. Children don't like to feel anxious; they are receptive to learning new ways to regain a sense of control. Teaching them relaxation, mental imagery, and biofeedback is an effective strategy. In addition, a child may need psychopharmacologic therapy, counseling, psychodynamic psychotherapy, or cognitive behavioral therapy.

There are children who have specific fears such as a fear of costumes, heights, or bugs. When the fear increases and begins to interfere with everyday functioning, it becomes a phobia. When the child is confronted by the feared object or situation, his coping skills may be overwhelmed, resulting in panic. This process creates a feedback loop that perpetuates the panic.

Often parents assume that their child will outgrow her fear. However, the longer the child's anxiety and fear remain untreated, the more difficult it will be to resolve. The slow exhalation of diaphragmatic breathing stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system. The resulting relaxation response is frequently an integral part of hypnosis. Relaxation can be extraordinarily beneficial, especially when combined with ego-strengthening and desensitization. Visualizing success during hypnosis is a powerful technique to increase feelings of self-efficacy and control.

## Habit Disorders

When an action is repeated often enough, it becomes habitual and automatic. The individual performs the behavior with very little, if any, conscious thought. The repetitive act may begin because it provides comfort, or it may result from a physical problem or illness. Some children model their habits after those they see around them. Other habits may result from stress or trauma. Once habituated, the habit may have no relation to the initial trigger.

These repetitive behavior patterns can have serious adverse health effects. They may result in social rejection, teasing, and humiliation. Some children want desperately to stop their habit, but they have no idea how to begin. They may have tried previously, and fear that they will fail again. Other children, for a variety of reasons, have no desire to change. The habit may provide them with comfort or relieve stress. Perhaps the behavior gets them attention and makes them feel special.

For some habit disorders, hypnotherapy may be the primary treatment modality. For others, it can be used as an effective adjunctive therapy. Habits are unconscious, repetitive actions. Therefore, an important first step is developing mindfulness about the behavior. The trance state may be utilized to increase self-control, motivation, and a sense of mastery. In hypnosis, the child can reduce anxiety and imagine a future free from the habit. Ego-strengthening is a vital part of every hypnotic encounter. It reinforces the child's confidence and sense of personal responsibility.

When children learn to control a habituated behavior through hypnotic intervention therapy, it is incredibly empowering. They know that, by tapping into their own inner resources, they have accomplished that feat all by themselves.

## Pain

Do you remember when your mother's kiss made a boo-boo all better? Most likely that was the first time you experienced a hypnotic intervention for pain control. Or perhaps it happened when your father tickled your tummy, and you forgot about the headache you used to have.

Pain is a complex phenomenon that can be affected by many factors. Because it is subjective, the experience can be altered. Nowhere is the mind–body–spirit connection so intricately woven as it is when we experience and relinquish pain.

A child who experiences acute pain is already in an altered state of focused attention and highly motivated to seek relief. Anxiety escalates pain, so when working with a child who is anxious and in pain, you must choose your words carefully. “Comfortable,” “gently,” “soothing,” and “easily” replace words such as “painful,” “burning,” “bad,” and “awful.” The hypnotherapist's calm confidence can foster positive expectation. Establishing rapport and providing a focus for the child's already intensified attention can reduce fear and anxiety about the pain.

When a child experiences chronic or recurrent pain, he has a sense of negative expectancy. Even when the pain lessens or disappears, he knows it will return. This expectation may result in despair, magnifying anxiety and intensifying the perception of pain.

When children learn during hypnosis the skills that allow them to take charge of their pain, they receive an incredible gift. Hypnosis provides them with active self-management strategies which can restore their sense of self-control and mastery. The techniques may be as simple as distracting a child with fantasy or direct suggestion. A child in pain may be stuck in the kinesthetic mode. Using visual imagery may allow her to see her way to recovery. The skilled

hypnotherapist may also use dissociation, distancing from the pain, or focusing attention on it and then changing its size, shape, color, location, or characteristic feel. As with any hypnotic encounter, ego-strengthening suggestions can help the child achieve a measure of success.

## Other Uses of Hypnosis

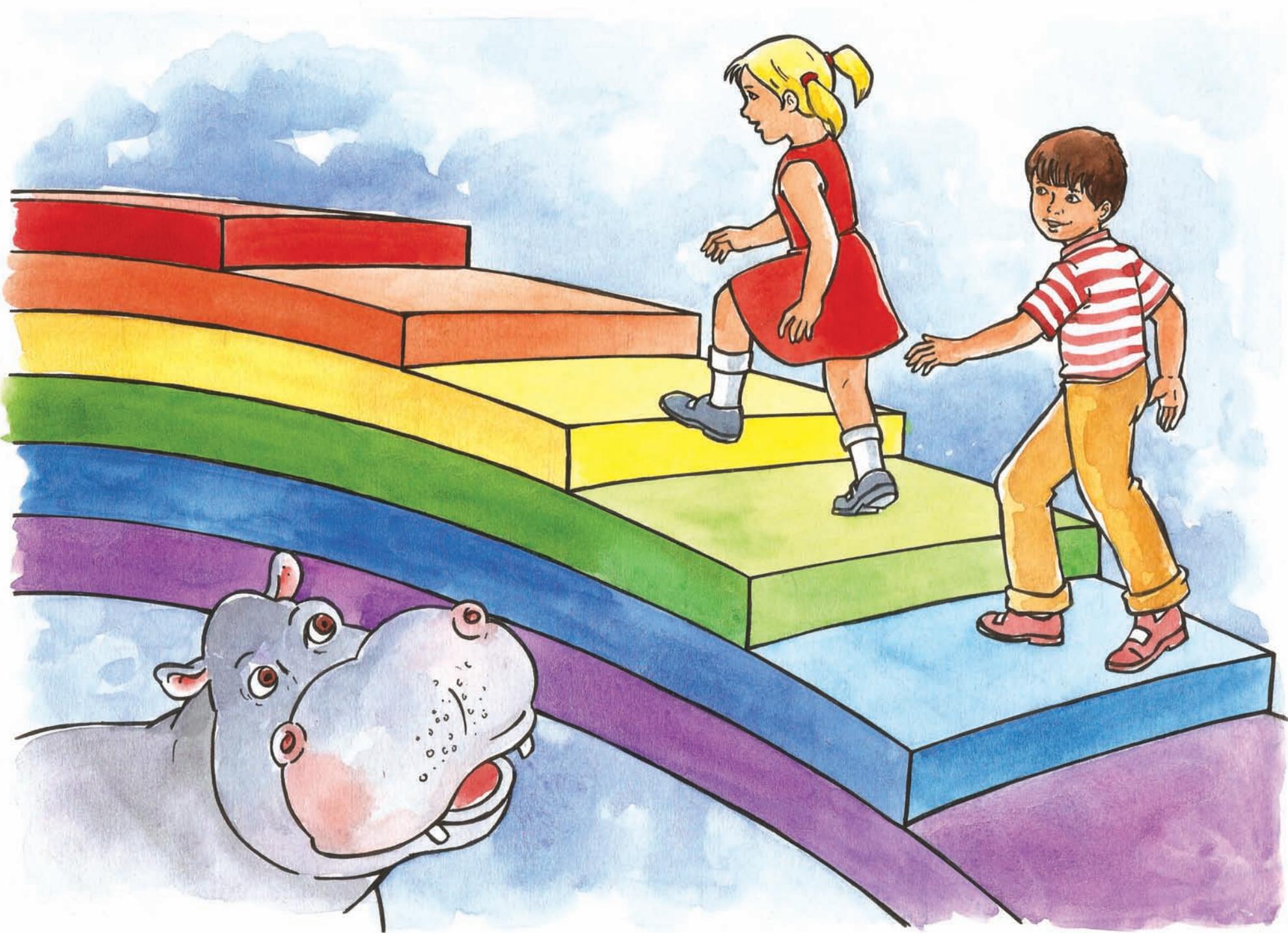
In pediatrics, there are a multitude of clinical applications for hypnosis. The careful use of language and hypnotherapeutic techniques can be incorporated into every pediatric encounter, including health check-ups, visits for acute or chronic illness, hospitalizations, and counseling sessions. Hypnotherapy can be used as an adjunctive therapy for children with psychological disorders such as depression. It can also be helpful for children who have problems with anger management, poor self-esteem, or ADHD. Hypnosis enhances confidence and self-efficacy, allowing the child to focus on a solution rather than the problem.

It is possible to enhance immune function with hypnosis, and thus effectively treat warts. Hypnosis has been used to resolve non-epileptic seizures. Some specialists consider it the definitive therapy for vocal cord dysfunction.

The word “cyber” comes from the Greek, meaning “to steer.” Cyberphysiology combines hypnosis and biofeedback. A child can be taught to “steer” his physiology in a beneficial direction. Biofeedback combined with hypnosis can be both fun and instructive for a child, enhancing his sense of mastery and competence. Once he has learned them, he can use these techniques to manage challenges throughout life.

## Summary

Metaphorical approaches to problems can bypass resistance by immersing the listener in a fanciful and engaging tale. Older children realize subconsciously the personal relevance of the story. The listener's personal negative internal dialogue may be suppressed, allowing new possibilities to flourish. The goals of these hypnotherapeutic metaphors are altering, reinterpreting and reframing. Most of all, the goal is to ENJOY the magic of imagination.





## Harry Teaches Haley and Conor About Hypnosis

Harry is a hippopotamus who lives at the Ashland Zoo. His favorite place at the zoo is a big mud puddle where he loves to splash around and duck under the water and pretend he is a submarine.

Harry has a wonderful imagination. His friends at the zoo call him Harry Hypno-potamus because he is so good at using his imagination to help himself when he is feeling scared or sick.

One morning, as Harry splashed happily in his mud puddle, he heard a little girl singing. Pretty soon, Harry's friend, Haley, and her cousin, Conor, skipped through the zoo's stone gate. They came to the zoo often. Haley, Conor, and Harry were good friends.

Harry popped up from the mud puddle with a toothy grin. "Haley!" he cried, "was that you singing?"

Haley nodded her head up and down so her long blond pigtails bounced on her shoulders.

"Yes, it was," she said.

Harry settled back in his mud puddle to listen to Haley singing. It was a song about a rainbow.

"What a wonderful song!" said Harry.

"I love rainbows," Haley told him. "Would you like to hear another song?"

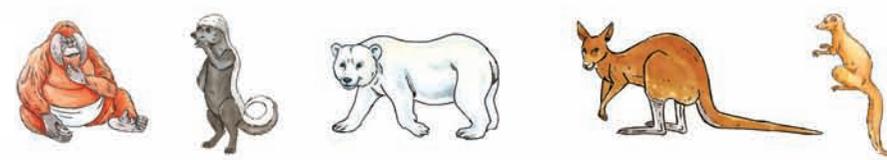
"I sure would!" Harry answered, blowing happy bubbles in the mud.

Haley rose up on her tiptoes and sang in a high, clear voice, about all the things she liked best. Conor joined in too. Thinking and singing about special things helped when they were sad or feeling bad.

"Wow!" Harry exclaimed. "That's just like hypnosis! When I feel worried or sad or sort of yucky, I think of my favorite things and then I don't feel so bad."

"What's hypnosis?" Conor asked.

"Well," said Harry, "it's a special kind of thinking you can do to help yourself. I already sort of knew how to do hypnosis, but I didn't know what it was called. It is like daydreaming, or pretending on purpose. It's like thinking to help yourself. Dr. Dan, the zoo's veterinarian, taught me how to do it. It's fun, and you can use it for all kinds of things."





“What sort of things?” Haley asked.

“Well,” said Harry, “my friend Brownie, the bat, had trouble sleeping. Dr. Dan taught Brownie hypnosis to help him sleep. Mitch Monkey used his imagination to help himself play basketball better. Another friend, Molly Macaw, had this bad habit of pulling out her feathers. After a while, she had hardly any feathers left. Dr. Dan taught her how to use hypnosis so she could get over that habit she used to have. Now she has the most beautiful feathers in the zoo! Pam Penguin used hypnosis and her imagination when she had an operation. It helped her to get better faster.”

“It sounds like magic,” Haley said.

“Imagination does work like magic,” Harry replied. “Once, when I had a very bad toothache, I used my imagination to pretend I was in Africa in a giant mud puddle. I got so busy thinking about that mud puddle that I didn’t think about my toothache anymore.”

Harry stood up and let the mud slide off his thick, gray hide, then he sat down beside Haley and Conor.

“Hypnosis is really fun. I like to practise even when I don’t have any problems. The more I practise, the better I get at using my imagination. It is like a present I can give to myself every day.”

“Could you teach us?” Haley asked.

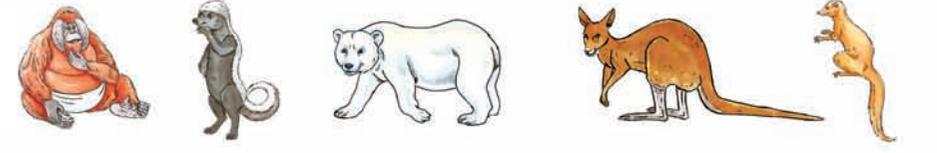
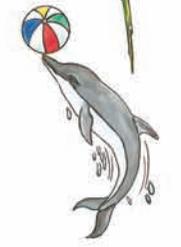
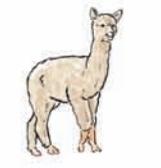
“Of course,” Harry replied. “First, get nice and comfortable. You can close your eyes or keep them open, whatever you would like or want to do ... now. That is the best part about hypnosis: there is no wrong way to do it, whatever works best for you, because you are in charge of your imagination. You are the boss of your pretending.

“Since you like rainbows, perhaps you would like to imagine a big beautiful rainbow. Just like in your song, we could go over the rainbow. There are steps going up the rainbow. Each step to the top of the rainbow is a different color.

“One. The first step is red. As you stand on the red step, think of one of your favorite things that is the color red—perhaps a beautiful red sunset, or maybe a big red balloon, or a shiny red apple.

“Two. The next step is orange. I wonder what favorite thing you will think of that is orange.

“Three. Then comes yellow. I know what my favorite thing is that is the color yellow, but yours may be different—whatever you want it to be.





“Four. The fourth step is green. Imagine something green that you really like.”

“Five. Blue is the color of the next step.”



“This is fun!” said Conor. “I am pretending I am riding my new blue bicycle.”

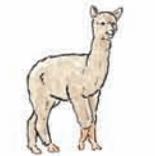


“Six. The last step at the top of the rainbow is purple.”

“Oh goodie!” said Haley “That’s my favorite color.”

“Those six steps take you to the top of the rainbow, and now you can choose how you want to go **down** the other side of the rainbow in your imagination. You could ride a bike **down**, or maybe slide **down** on a sled, or find another fun way. Whatever your imagination wants to do to take you over the rainbow, where troubles melt like lemon drops, where nothing needs to make you sad or worried, where tummy aches or boo-boos don’t need to bother you because you are having fun. You are the boss of your imagination. You are pretending on purpose. You are in charge.

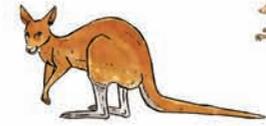
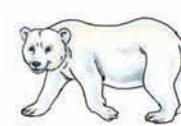
“Your imagination lives inside your brain, so it is always there for you to use whenever and wherever you need or want to use it. The more you practise hypnosis, the better you get at it.”



“That was really cool!” Haley said.

“I loved using hypnosis,” said Conor. “It made my whole body feel good, relaxed, and comfortable. I am going to practise every night at bedtime.”

“That’s wonderful!” Harry replied. “You could be Conor Hypno and maybe Hayley could be the Imagination Princess!”



*Harry the Hypno-potamus, Volume 2* contains 35 fresh new stories that address common physical and emotional problems of childhood.

Harry, a hippopotamus with an excellent imagination that he uses to overcome his own problems, and Dr. Dan, who is the Ashland Zoo's wise veterinarian, join forces to teach the zoo animals all about hypnosis and the power of imagination. Each story is both delightful and helpful, using techniques and hypnotic language that will aid clinicians who work with children to resolve or manage pain, anxiety, fears, or habit disorders.

While children are busy enjoying these amusing tales, the cleverly embedded therapeutic messages slip into the unconscious. Children will relate to the various animals featured as they share how they experience their problems – and some of the ways they learn to deal with them. New possibilities for self-empowerment are revealed with each turn of the page. Along the way, interesting information is provided about the particular species highlighted. The book also offers guidance to clinicians about the use of metaphor and how the stories can become an essential part of their work with children.

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“The author has taken a wealth of hypnotherapy, NLP and many other techniques well known to most therapists and magically woven them into [teaching] stories about the animals at the Ashland Zoo.”

**Pat Doohan FNCP, Fellow of the National Council of Psychotherapists**

“Wow! Linda Thomson has done it again by providing the clinician with additional hypnotherapeutic techniques that can be used with children.”

**William C. Wester, II, EdD, ABPH, ABPP,  
Past President, American Society of Clinical Hypnosis**

“... a tremendous resource for the professional and lay person alike. These simple yet effective stories have an unmistakable power within them which entertains yet at the same time boosts positivity and is empowering to the child.”

**David Slater, Clinical Hypnotherapist and Counsellor**

“This is a valuable handbook for every child, sick or healthy, and for parents, pediatric experts, nurses, and social workers.”

**Dr. Consuelo Casula, Psychotherapist**

“Parents, teachers, health care workers, and young listeners will learn new ways to deal with fear, anxiety, phobia, PTSD, invasive medical procedures, and other buggy, spooky things.”

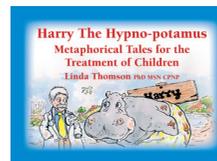
**David M. Wark, PhD, ABPH, President of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis**

“Linda Thomson's special gift for meaningful storytelling will make it possible for children with a variety of presenting problems to benefit from her wisdom and compassion. Her hypnotic style encourages developing solutions to problems and, more than that, empowers young people to actively participate in a creative way in the process of growth.”

**Michael D. Yapko, PhD, Clinical Psychologist,  
author of *Trancework: An Introduction to the Practice of Clinical Hypnosis***

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**Linda Thomson PhD MSN CPNP** a pediatric nurse practitioner for over thirty years, works in both family and pediatric practice. As an Approved Consultant in Clinical Hypnosis by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, she incorporates hypnosis into her practice to help children help themselves with many different physical and emotional problems. Dr. Thomson has published on a wide variety of topics and is an engaging and popular teacher and speaker at national and international workshops and conferences.



**Also available**

**Harry the Hypno-potamus Volume 1**

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“The ‘Harry Potter’ of the hypnosis world.”

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