

Harry the Hypno-potamus

Metaphorical Tales for the Treatment of Children

Volume 1

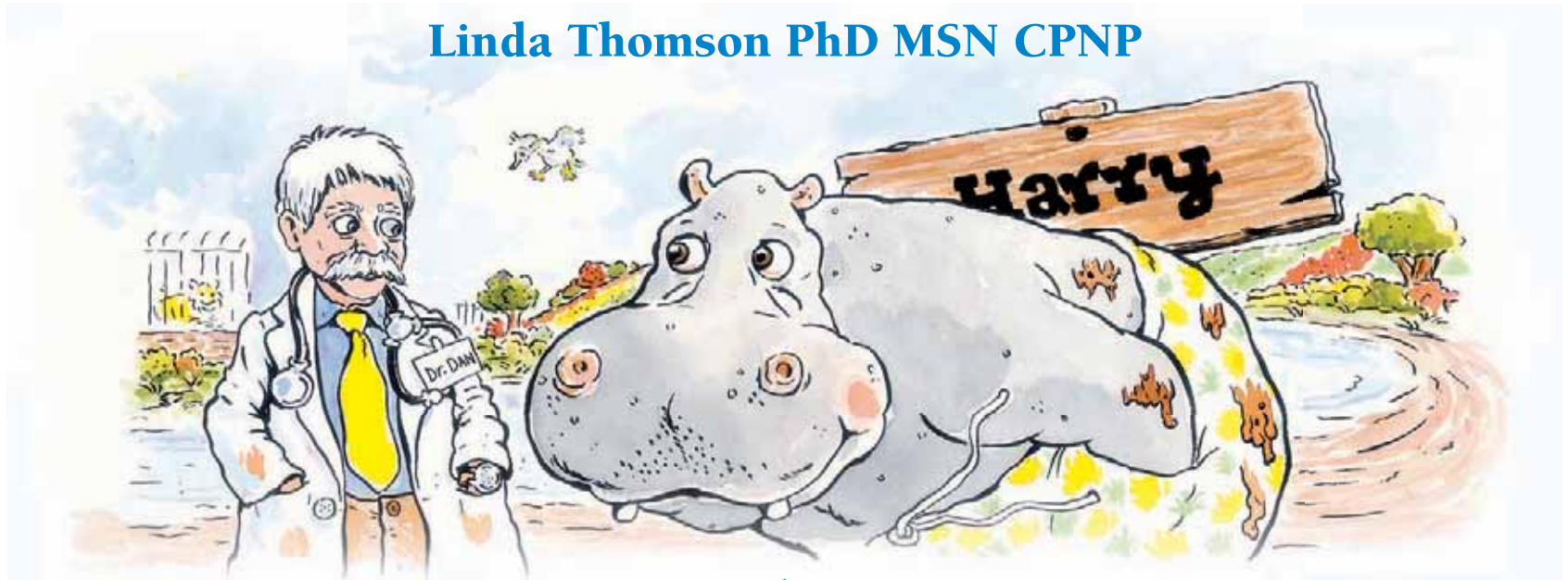
Linda Thomson PhD MSN CPNP



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Introduction

This book is written for pediatric health and mental health professionals who have an understanding of child development and previous training in hypnotherapy. *Harry the Hypno-potamus* contains metaphors that deal with a variety of physical and behavioral problems. Imbedded in each metaphor are hypnotherapeutic techniques that can be used as part of a comprehensive approach to the diagnosis and treatment of certain disorders.

Reading the first story, “How Harry the Hypno-potamus Got His Name”, to a child is a wonderful introduction to hypnosis and the power of imagination. The stories in the rest of the book are about different animals that all live in the Ashland Zoo. Each has a physical or emotional problem and learns specific hypnotherapeutic techniques and self-regulatory strategies to help master it.

The clinician may choose to either read one of the stories with a child, or adapt the techniques to his own unique style. Some of the therapeutic interventions are very problem-specific; others are more general and can be used for a variety of conditions. The developmental age of the child must also be taken into account, as well as his or her cognitive and perceptual skills, so the clinician can adapt the induction, language, and hypnotic techniques to the child’s developmental level.

Contained within some of the stories are hypnotic scripts. Pacing, leading, cadence, rhythm, and vocal inflections are all important in hypnosis. In the scripted portion of the tales, the words that deserve emphasis in a hypnotic intervention are in bold face type.

Pediatric Hypnosis

An integral part of play is imagining and pretending. For most children, an altered state of consciousness is familiar, comfortable, and easy to achieve. Children need to explore and experience their surroundings. They want to engage with others and their environment. They are relentlessly curious about the how and why of objects, people, situations and themselves, and have an urge for mastery and control. Endless possibilities are open to them through their inner world of imagination. A child can employ fantasy to change or avoid an unpleasant situation, gratify unmet needs, remember the past, or invent the future.

Children want to be happy, healthy, comfortable and successful. When physical, mental or environmental conditions interfere, a child may develop maladaptive behavior, either consciously or unconsciously. During a therapeutic alliance, hypnotherapy can be a very powerful tool for a clinician who is invested in helping the child experience success, comfort and health. The hypnotherapeutic work enhances and strengthens the child’s natural strivings toward exploration, social relationships, fantasy, and creativity.

Children want to experience life to the greatest extent possible; therefore, cultivating a child’s imagination with hypnosis is not only appealing, but effective. The success of a hypnotherapeutic approach to treatment depends on several factors that can be remembered by the acronym **AH CREAM** (see next page). The most important one is rapport. The strength of the therapeutic alliance between child and clinician is critical. The child needs to feel safe and able to trust the professional. An accurate assessment

of the problem, including a thorough history, is necessary. The clinician must be not only competent, and confident that he or she can help the child, but credentialed as well. A health professional should not use hypnosis to treat a condition that she is not qualified to treat without hypnosis. The child needs to expect that the hypnotherapy will be successful and actively participate in the process. Hypnosis is not something that is done to a child; it is something that the child does to and for himself, or allows to happen when he has set the goal he wishes to achieve. The child's motivation to change is another important variable in the success of the hypnotherapeutic intervention.

AH CREAM

- A:** Accurate assessment
- H:** History
- C:** Confidence, competence, and credentials
- R:** Rapport
- E:** Expectation
- A:** Active participation
- M:** Motivation

Metaphorical Approaches

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a metaphor is worth a million. Like parables, myths, and fairy tales, metaphors convey an idea in an indirect way by using symbolic language. Hypnosis is a right brain phenomenon, and the right brain is symbolic. Metaphor may well be the language of the right brain.

Throughout civilization, metaphors have been used as a teaching method. The parables of the Bible, the fairy tales of the Grimm brothers, and the fables of Aesop are all familiar to western cultures. As children, we learned the lessons of “The Little Engine That Could” and “The Hare and the Tortoise”. Those tales had far greater impact than the verbal admonitions “don’t give up” and “slow and steady wins the race” ever could.

Metaphors allow the hypnotherapist to communicate simultaneously with both the conscious and unconscious minds. The conscious mind processes the words, the story, 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 of the metaphor. In hypnosis, the wider meaning of the metaphor is never fully explained, so that the unconscious mind is left to explore just beyond the grasp of reason. It is this pursuit of personalized relevance that gives the metaphor its potency. When a hypnotherapist uses metaphors, the moral of the story is never explained, as it is in Aesop’s fables, leaving the individual to figure out the meaning for herself—a much more powerful experience.

The potency of a metaphor is created through a right brain experience linking emotion, symbolic language, and life experience. The goal of the metaphor is to expand human consciousness. After Vogel and Bogen created a split brain by surgically transecting the

*corpus collosum**, researchers learned a great deal about how the two hemispheres of the brain process information. Although the hemispheres process information cooperatively, each has its own unique style or specialization. The left brain works logically and literally to process the sequential coding of the printed word, while the right brain simultaneously processes language in a holistic, implicative, and imagistic fashion. Right-brain function is necessary to generate the imagery and glean the meaning of a story.

Metaphor appears to be the language of the right brain. When communication is metaphorical, the right hemisphere is activated, since this is the hemisphere that is more involved in processing subjective and sensory experiences. Psychosomatic symptoms are processed by predominately right brain functions; psychosomatic illness may be an expression in the language of the right brain. Since the comprehension of metaphors is a right brain phenomenon, using metaphors in hypnosis may be a means of communicating directly with the right brain in its own language. Metaphorical approaches to therapy may be much less time-intensive because of the right hemispheric mediation of both symptomatology and metaphorical meaning. Metaphors allow the hypnotherapist to speak symbolically to the unconscious mind.

Using metaphors in hypnosis effects change in a positive direction. Therapeutic suggestions may not be overtly obvious to the listener. The suggestion may be so cleverly entwined and embedded in the story that the child is unconsciously influenced to change without being consciously admonished to do so. This may result in a sense

*In the 1960s, neurosurgeons performed an experimental and unprecedented surgical procedure on a patient with epilepsy. They intentionally severed the nerve pathways between the two hemispheres of the brain. As a result scientists discovered that the right and left brain have their own unique style of processing information (Sperry, 1968).

of accomplishment and a greater feeling of self-confidence. Through metaphors, the child may be exposed to new possibilities, new perspectives, and differing philosophies. Metaphors help to bypass resistance because they are subjectively experienced. The child views the problem as something that is happening to somebody else; therefore, she does not feel personally threatened.

Adding positive input to the unconscious is only one aim of metaphors. Metaphors replenish the soul. Because they are non-threatening, they often engage and enhance empowerment, causing children to stretch their minds, broaden their horizons, and develop wisdom. Metaphors help to change patterns of behavior by altering the individual's usual way of thinking.

Restating the child's problem in a non-threatening metaphor provides the patient with a different view of the situation. Reframing helps the child 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 the situation is viewed or conceptualized is changed, thereby altering the entire meaning. Sometimes it is necessary for the child to use senses or perceptions different from the ones he would ordinarily use to experience success. With metaphorical approaches, the child's unconscious mind is encouraged to develop novel ways to overcome limitations.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal and universal human experience that results from a real or perceived danger, or a threat to safety. The individual may feel a loss of self-control, self-esteem, or self-efficacy. Physical symptoms that may result from anxiety include tachycardia, shortness of breath, dizziness, insomnia, avoidance behavior, tremulousness, and difficulty concentrating. In response to stress,

children may experience headache, recurrent abdominal pain, nausea, and/or sleep disturbances.

In youngsters, anxiety is the most commonly occurring mental disorder, and one of the most easily treated with hypnosis. No one likes to feel anxious. Children are very receptive to learning new ways to regain a sense of control; they want to feel empowered to take charge of their bodies and their lives. Teaching children relaxation, mental imagery, and biofeedback is an effective therapeutic strategy. In addition, children may need psychopharmacologic therapy, counseling, psychodynamic psychotherapy, or cognitive behavioral therapy.

Anxiety may have a specific cause or be more generalized, without an objective focus. As a specific anxiety increases, the patient develops a fear. If the fear enlarges and begins to envelop day-to-day functioning, it becomes a phobia. Anxiety can instantaneously overwhelm some children's coping skills and result in panic. This triggers the release of adrenalin, resulting in unpleasant physical symptoms. The process may create a feedback loop that perpetuates the panic.

Anxiety is a problem of degree. It can be a desirable and appropriate response to a realistic danger; however, when the child's response is out of proportion to the actual threat, the anxiety can significantly disrupt his life. The longer the child's anxiety and fears remain untreated in the hope that he may outgrow them, the more difficult it may become to eradicate them. The relaxation response, frequently an integral part of hypnosis, can be extraordinarily beneficial, especially when combined with desensitization and ego strengthening. Visualizing success during hypnosis is a powerful technique to increase feelings of self-efficacy and control.

Habit Disorders

A habit is a constant, often unconscious, inclination to repeatedly perform an action. The behavior may begin for a variety of reasons and initially serve an important purpose or function. A habit may result from stress or trauma. As the behavior is increasingly repeated, it becomes habituated, and may have nothing whatever to do with the initial trigger.

Some habit disorders may have adverse health effects. The child who has one may suffer humiliation and social rejection, resulting in low self-esteem. She may refuse to go to school. Medications with unpleasant side effects may be prescribed.

Many children have no desire to alter their repetitive behavior patterns. The behavior may provide comfort or a release from stress. "Ownership" of the habit can make the child feel powerful, or he may enjoy the way it aggravates his parent. Some children want desperately to stop their habit, but haven't any idea where to begin. They may have tried unsuccessfully to quit, and fear another failure.

Depending on the habit, hypnosis may be used as the primary treatment modality, or as an adjunctive therapy. Creating mindfulness about the habitual behavior is the first important step. A behavior is a habit only if it is something the child does without thinking about it. The hypnotic trance state decreases a patient's anxiety, and may be used to increase motivation and sense of control. Ego strengthening is part of every hypnotic strategy. It reinforces the child's confidence, sense of personal responsibility, and mastery.

Hypnosis has been used very successfully to control a variety of habit disorders in children. When a child is taught self-hypnosis, he has received an incredible gift. It is empowering for a child to control a habit that once controlled him. The child now owns the



Marlene Worry Warthog

Marlene was an African pig. She was not cute, or cuddly, or graceful, but she was amazing. Marlene could live in an area without any water for several months. She liked to take sand baths, and she loved rubbing her bristly body against trees and termite mounds. Marlene was a surprisingly fast runner, even backwards. She couldn't see very well, but if she smelled or heard an enemy, she would bolt backwards into a hole, defending herself with her very long tusks.

Marlene came to live at the Ashland Zoo when she was a baby. She was called a "warthog" because she had four large, lumpy warts on her face. Harry the Hypno-potamus called her "Worry Warthog", because Marlene worried about everything. When she got up in the morning, all of Marlene's worries woke up with her: What if the sun doesn't shine? What if the visitors at the Ashland Zoo think I am ugly? What if Elkins, the elephant, gets sunburned and turns pink? All of this what-ifying made the warthog feel nervous all the time.

Harry noticed that sometimes Marlene was so busy what-ifying and worrying that she forgot to have fun

and be happy. One day, he said to her, "You know, I used to worry about a lot of things."

"What things?" asked Marlene.

"Oh, stuff," said Harry. "I worried about all kinds of stuff. For instance, when I heard that the zoo was going to move me to a new home, I was very nervous."

"You don't look worried now," said the worry warthog.

"That's because I learned to use hypnosis," Harry said.

"Hypnosis? What's that?" asked Marlene.

"It's a way of using your imagination to help yourself," the hypno-potamus replied.

Marlene snorted. "I already use my imagination. I imagine that nobody likes me. I imagine that it might rain on the zoo picnic and ruin everything. I imagine a rock falling on my toe and squashing it ..."

Harry said, "Using your imagination is like riding an elevator. It can take you down to a place where you probably don't want to be, a place full of worries and fears, but it can also take you up to incredible heights







and wonderful places. With your imagination, you can take the elevator all the way up to the sky and fly with the eagles.”

“You already have a great imagination,” said Harry. “You can imagine all this bad stuff, so why not use your imagination to imagine good stuff. You could use your imagination to help yourself with the what-ifs.”

The worried warthog thought about what Harry had told her. She said, “You know, Harry, sometimes friends are like elevators: they can support you and lift you up, or they can take you down.”

After Harry and Marlene talked some more, the worried warthog decided to use hypnosis and her imagination to help herself. She wanted to ride the elevator up, not down, and be the kind of friend who lifts your spirits up, not one who takes you down.

Marlene was ready to ride the elevator of her imagination up to some place wonderful. As she got onto the elevator, she dragged all her baggage full of worries and what-ifs with her. All that weight made the elevator so heavy it started to go down, not up. Marlene knew she needed to do something. She used her wonderful imagination to imagine a WIFT, a What-if Trash. She imagined the WIFT to be pink,

because pink was her favorite color. She painted it with daisies, because she loved flowers. She made the WIFT out of steel, because she wanted it to be strong and safe. Marlene’s WIFT looked a little bit like a mailbox. It had a slot to stick stuff in, but you couldn’t get the stuff back out.

Marlene began to put all her what-ifs and worries into the WIFT. After a while, she discovered that, any time she began to have any nervous feelings ... ZING! They shot right into the WIFT. This was a truly amazing WIFT that Marlene made, because it never got too full to put things in, yet it never let the stuff back out. It kept everything safe until the time for the what-if had passed, and then ... POOF! ... it WIFTED, and just magically disappeared. After that, Marlene could remember to forget, or forget to remember, the what-if that she had put in the WIFT. And with the what-ifs in the WIFT till they WIFT and POOFED, Marlene felt free to remember to remember to do fun stuff. She could ride the elevator of her imagination up, up, up, up, and away.





Molly Macaw

Molly was a macaw from the Amazon rainforest in Peru. A macaw is a kind of parrot—actually, the biggest and most beautiful member of the parrot family. Molly’s feathers were the colors of a rainbow: blue, green, red, orange, and yellow. She was brought to the Ashland Zoo in the United States so everyone could see her beautiful rainbow feathers.

In the United States, everyone was kind to Molly, and she liked the zoo, but she missed the tropical forest in Peru with its tall trees and beautiful flowers, and she missed her friends. Molly had many good friends who lived with her near the wide Amazon River. There were frogs, monkeys, sloths, butterflies, snakes and lizards. Her best friend was a toucan. He had a big colorful beak that was perfect for tearing open fruit to eat.

One day, when Molly was feeling homesick, she pulled out one of her tail feathers. It seemed to make her feel better. The next day she pulled out two more. Soon, she got to be so good at pulling out her feathers that

she did it even when she wasn’t feeling sad. Pulling out her feathers became a habit, something she did so easily she often didn’t even know she was doing it.

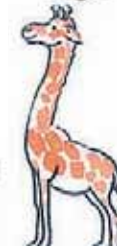
There were other things that Molly did so well that she didn’t even have to think about it—flying, for instance. That was a good habit.

Molly loved to fly to her favorite place—a small lake in the middle of the Ashland Zoo. One day, when she was perched on a tree there, she looked down and saw her reflection in the water.

“My feathers!” the macaw cried. “What happened to my beautiful feathers?”

Molly’s coat of rainbow feathers was torn and ragged. Most of the red feathers—her favorite ones—were gone. Molly felt very upset. To soothe her feelings, she dipped her beak under her wing and pulled out a long, blue feather.

“Oh, no!” she squawked. “I didn’t mean to do that. I’ve got to stop, but I don’t know how.”





"I can help," said a cheerful voice.

Molly looked down from her tree branch and saw Harry the Hypno-potamus swimming toward her from the middle of the lake. When he got to the shore, Harry said to Molly, "I wasn't listening on purpose, but you have a pretty loud voice, and I couldn't help hearing what you said."

Molly was so startled she didn't know what to say.

"Dr. Dan, the veterinarian here at the zoo, showed me how I can control things I never knew I could by using my imagination," said Harry. "Dr. Dan calls it 'hypnosis.' I'm very good at it. That's why the sign over my new home says, 'Harry the Hypno-potamus.'"

"I sure could use some help," said Molly. "If I don't stop pulling out my feathers, I'll be as bald as a bird's egg. Do you think I could learn hypnosis?"

"Of course," said Harry. "Hypnosis is a lot like daydreaming on purpose. It is a way of thinking that helps you to help yourself. You can start right now."

Molly settled back on her tree branch and made herself comfortable.

"Imagine soaring through the rainforest," said Harry. "Notice all the shades of color ... Listen to the sounds of the place—the birds, the monkeys, the insects, so familiar, so **safe**, so **comfortable** ... Feel the warmth of the sun and the gentle coolness of a breeze on your feathers ... Breathe in the smell of the place, so **relaxing**, so **peaceful** ... Perhaps you are tasting your favorite food from the rainforest."

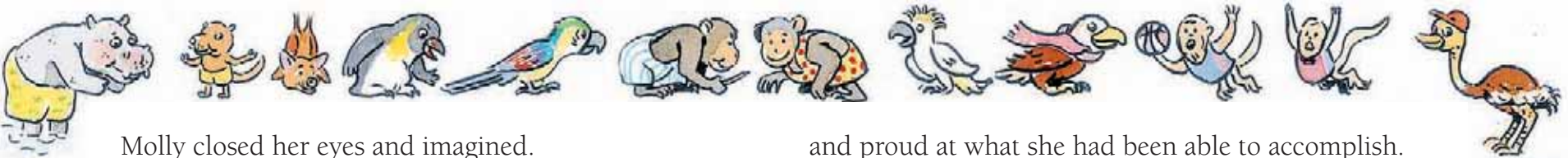
While Molly was using her imagination to see, feel, and hear her beautiful rainforest, and to eat its delicious fruit, she began to notice how **good** and how **comfortable** her body felt.

"I'm going to show Shurcan how to daydream on purpose," Molly said. "Shurcan is a toucan, but not a real one. I imagined him, just like I imagine soaring through the rainforest. But he is my friend, and he came all the way from the rainforest to keep me company."

"I bet Shurcan could help you to keep your feathers," said Harry. "Every time you feel the urge to pull out a feather, see and feel Shurcan Toucan's big, beautiful beak pushing your bill away from your feathers."







Molly closed her eyes and imagined.

“Sometimes,” suggested Harry, “when you feel the urge to pull a feather, you could imagine finding a giant switch, like the kind that turns a light on and off. You could use that switch to turn off the urge to pull a feather. At other times when you feel like pulling your feathers, you could see a giant stop sign in your imagination.”

Molly did all the things that Harry suggested. Then Harry said, “Look into the mirror of your imagination and see yourself as you would like to look, and feel, and be, with all of your pretty and colorful feathers.”

“That’s easy,” said Molly. She looked into the mirror of her imagination every day, and her imaginary feathers grew prettier and more colorful all the time.

One day, when Molly flew to her favorite tree by the lake, she looked down from her branch and noticed her reflection. “My feathers really are thick and beautiful,” Molly cried. “And see how long my tail feathers have grown!”

Every time that Molly used hypnosis to help herself with the habit she used to have, she felt very happy

and proud at what she had been able to accomplish. She learned what she never knew she knew, and controlled what she never knew she could. She was thinking to help herself, daydreaming on purpose. She told all this to Harry the next time she saw him. Harry gave her a great big hippo grin.

“That’s hypnosis,” Harry said happily.

“I call it the Magic of Imagination,” Molly Macaw said.



Harry the Hypno-potamus is a collection of metaphorical stories that rely on hypnosis and other relaxation techniques to deal with a wide variety of physical and behavioral problems faced by children of all ages. The thirty-two illustrated stories feature animals in the Ashland Zoo that rely on the guidance and support of Dr. Dan, the zoo's vet, to help master such problems as:

- **Phobias and anxiety attacks**
- **Sleep disorders**
- **Habits and Habit Control**
- **Pain Management**
- **Asthma and other serious medical disorders**
- **Death and dying**

Imbedded in each story is a metaphor as well as hypnotherapeutic techniques to be used as part of a comprehensive approach to diagnosis and treatment. The book also includes an invaluable section for the clinician that explains how to use the stories in practice and how they should be presented to children. A most engaging collection of stories that is sure to help with many of the physical and emotional problems of childhood.

"*Harry the Hypno-potamus* is the 'Harry Potter' of the hypnosis world. Now, when parents ask clinicians how we can help their children, Linda Thomson has provided the answer—we teach them to hypno-potamize!"

**Julie H. Linden PhD, President-elect,
American Society of Clinical Hypnosis**

"A tremendous resource for clinical hypnotherapists of stories that are both positive and empowering. With its entertaining characters, this book is valuable to anyone wishing to better understand and utilize metaphors."

Rick Voit PhD, co-author of *Hypnosis in Clinical Practice*

"If you think these are just stories for children, you'll be missing out on a real treat. The Ashland Zoo offers us touches of humor, lovable characters, lessons in compassion and helpful healing hints delivered in a readable style."

**Norma Barretta PhD and Philip F. Barretta MA, Approved
Consultants, American Society of Clinical Hypnosis**

Linda Thomson PhD MSN CPNP has been a pediatric nurse practitioner for thirty years working 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.

"... an excellent resource for therapists working with young children and for children to read by themselves, in order to help with many childhood problems and unwanted habits."

Pat Doohan FNCP, National Council of Psychotherapists

"This is one of the most unusual and yet exciting books that I have had the pleasure of reviewing. ... it will have a major impact on the effective use of Hypnotherapy with children of all ages."

David Slater, The Hypnotherapist

"How I wish Linda Thomson's excellent book had been around years ago when I was beginning in practice as a hypnotherapist. The approach she takes and the delightful stories she tells are bound to benefit any child in need of help—and probably quite a few adults too."

**Ursula Markham, Founder and
Principal of The Hypnothink Foundation**

"... anyone who treats children in their practice would find this book very useful."

Terri Bodell NACHP

"Parents and teachers as well as pediatric health care professionals will learn lots from this book. The stories of Harry and his many zoo friends teach children how to train their attention in imaginative, practical and healing ways. This a carefully considered book, and is a valuable contribution to the field of clinical hypnosis."

**Penny Tompkins, co-author of *Metaphors in Mind:
Transformation through Symbolic Modelling***

"I believe this book would prove to be as useful a resource for working with children as 'the big red book' has been for working with adults all these years."

Fidelity, The Journal for the National Council of Psychotherapists



Also available
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Linda Thomson PhD MSN CPNP
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