

The Effects of Autosuggestion – The Top Hat Explanation

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Abstract

It is important that we understand the role of the unconscious mind¹ in the formation, acceptance and implementation of beliefs. This article will discuss the impact of autosuggestion and present a procedure that assists our children in developing a happy, self-confident and harmonious belief structure using the power of deliberate suggestion.

If our children are to grow into responsible, creative, healthy, productive and resourceful adults, it is urgent that we care for them now, while they are children. We need to find a way of delivering empowering suggestions so that they will be accepted by the child's unconscious mind and bypass conscious critical analysis and possible rejection.

Introduction

The Goulding SleepTalk[®] for Children Process was designed to assist children to develop calmness and a positive self-image, and to establish (or re-establish) a positive belief structure, replacing previously accepted negative suggestions. Children and families dealing with a range of issues such as tantrums, trauma, stress, and separation anxiety all respond well to the SleepTalk[®] Process; this includes physically, emotionally and intellectually impaired children.

The SleepTalk[®] for Children Process is a series of statements presented by the parents each and every evening to the sleeping child. Presented consistently, this process activates actual changes in the brain, as the new studies into neuroplasticity indicate. (Refer to *The Brain That Changes Itself* by Dr Norman Doidge.)

Much of life's creative process happens without our conscious knowledge. There are conscious and unconscious forces operating in our lives. We make some decisions consciously and many decisions unconsciously. The unconscious mind impersonally follows its 'instructions' – the beliefs held in our unconscious mind – with equal efficiency, whether they are true or not.

The relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind is not yet fully understood. If it were, psychoanalysts would educate their clients as well as psychoanalysing them. Being the owners of this instrument, we are entitled to know how it works! However enough is known to enable us to learn how to help ourselves, each other, and our children.

Becoming aware of how 'mind energy' is distributed between the unconscious and the conscious is essential if we are to assist our children. Children are subjected to suggestions from the moment of birth, if not before. These suggestions are both positive and, unfortunately more often than not, negative; some of these suggestions are directed toward children deliberately and some are uttered quite 'unconsciously'.

It is paramount that children develop a positive, confident self-image in order to deal effectively with their world, and the SleepTalk[®] Process offers a way of balancing negative messages and of deliberately establishing a positive belief system.

The Unconscious Mind is Similar to a Computer

The unconscious is similar to a vast computer. It records all of our experiences, both conscious and unconscious. If we understand the mechanism of the human mind we can take charge of our lives because the real controller or director of our lives is consciousness.

The unconscious mind doesn't know what reality actually is. It cannot distinguish between reality, fantasy and imagination. The unconscious mind does not evaluate information. Being deductive, it can only act upon the ideas and beliefs delivered to it by the conscious mind. When a child is criticised for being slow or messy or stupid, he or she takes that information on board as *fact*, even if it was out of proportion and is not the 'whole truth' of who that child is. The child begins to believe that assessment and integrate it into his or her sense of identity, thus forming a system of beliefs. In this

¹ The 'unconscious mind' is also referred to as the 'subconscious mind' by various experts and professionals. In this discussion, the terms are interchangeable.

way, our belief system is formed during childhood as we absorb the ideas and comments made to and about us, and 'take them on board' as beliefs and 'truths'. We arrive at conclusions about ourselves and life itself as a result of both the suggestions made to us and of the suggestions we make 'to ourselves' (auto-suggestion).

In adults, the information presented to the brain goes through a process of conscious and unconscious acceptance, however as children we do not have a conscious, critical, analytical logic and so we accept everything. The external stimuli of suggestions does not travel through the barriers of logical appraisal and comparison before being finally accepted as that logic has not yet developed. Instead, the conscious mind is constantly accepting suggestions from its environment and transforming those suggestions into autosuggestions. They enter into the storehouse of memory, becoming part of a belief system at the unconscious level. The child has an impeccable memory, remembering whatever the conscious mind has been led to believe, and never, ever forgets!

The greatest development of the belief system occurs during the first five to seven years of a person's life as the child attempts to make meaning of all the information presented to him/her. During this period, our belief system is greatly influenced by those in authority, since we more readily accept the opinions and declarations of those we perceive as having greater power or knowledge, i.e. our parents. (Goulding, 1991). All of these beliefs are integrated into the wiring and structure of the brain from birth (and even earlier). The child therefore draws information from those in authority, and in the process forms his or her self-image, regardless of how accurate or useful the information is.

It follows that if a child is in a negative environment he or she will acquire negative input and consequently form negative belief systems at the unconscious level, leading to all sorts of disruptive behaviours. Conversely, of course, a child in a positive environment will receive positive inputs and develop more positive belief systems, and therefore more positive 'outputs' (behaviours).

In normal situations, the first person in authority over a child is the mother. The father and the older children within the family generally establish a secondary authority. The next major authorities in a child's life (after the age of five) are the schoolteacher and those within the school environment.

All parents and teachers are bound to lose their temper or control occasionally, losing sight of the fact that their words at those times can make children feel wounded, rejected or unloved. Whether the words or suggestions are positive or negative, the results are always the same: our children remember them for life! The impressions they gain from our communications are long-lasting, and can cause children to feel hurt, or, with the same intensity, loved, respected and accepted. When the messages are hurtful, serious damage may result to the child's self-esteem and the bond of trust between themselves and those in authority over them.

To understand how these suggestions are accepted by our children, we need to discuss some of the different yet natural divisions of the mind. Throughout history there have been many different explanations and descriptions of the brain/mind, and the following is just one.

The Conscious Brain, the Modern Unconscious, the Unconscious and the Deep Unconscious

The late John Cheetham, from the Student Achievement Centre based in Melbourne, Victoria, described the conscious mind as: "Being aware of the environment, the self and mental activity. To a certain extent, the **conscious brain** determines a person's choices of action. The conscious brain is critical and analytical. The **modern unconscious** stores information gained or processed during one waking period. Dreams are sometimes stored in the modern unconscious and then brought to conscious awareness at the very first transition from the sleeping state to the waking state. The **unconscious mind**, the reservoir of permanent memory and belief is very literal and doesn't make evaluations or judgements. Finally, the **deep unconscious** is that part of the mind not readily available to conscious access. It is here that apparently 'forgotten' things remain faithfully and permanently stored.

Beliefs and Belief Systems

Any information accepted into the unconscious mind and held there as memory becomes *belief, whether true or not*. Most of us as children accepted suggestions such as "It's bad luck if you walk under a ladder". All human responses are based upon accepted beliefs held in the deep unconscious mind. Situations are presented to our conscious minds but we react to them via beliefs held in our unconscious minds.

Since suggestions given to us while we are young bypass the critical and analytical conscious mind and are accepted straight into the unconscious, they immediately become *beliefs, regardless of the truth*. Beliefs and belief systems held as truth in the unconscious mind will be acted upon

automatically by children, directly affecting response and behaviour. Once a suggestion is accepted in the subconscious mind it automatically becomes part of the mind's belief system, whether true or not.

You can imagine how a child, who has not developed critical analytical faculties, can gain the wrong impression from even simple statements. For example, many of us have heard a parent say: "Why aren't you as good as your brother/sister?" That suggestion could go deeply into the unconscious mind, along with an array of emotions! While the comment may not be remembered until many years later, the impression made by the remark may still be held fast in the belief system and acted upon by the unconscious mind.

We hold many beliefs about ourselves and about 'life'; some are true and some are not. All these beliefs combine to form a belief system that controls our behaviour, how we interact with others, and how we cope with life events. We then evaluate our experiences and responses with our conscious, critical, analytical mind, often 'locking into place' limiting beliefs because, while new information is constantly added to the existing belief system about ourselves, it can be very difficult to change a belief – even with conscious re-evaluation. Instead, we tend to prove our current set of beliefs to ourselves by noticing which of our experiences confirm those beliefs and ignoring or rejecting the elements that counter those beliefs.

One of the intuitive needs of a human being is to feel wanted and valued. Children seek attention from their parents for validation, and sometimes parents are not able to provide that attention. When a child – or even an adult – feels unwanted, the feeling automatically becomes a negative autosuggestion. The belief created leaves a very insecure self-image in the unconscious mind and lasts for a lifetime.

Children themselves can be cruel to each other because they often establish their own identity at the expense of other children in the family. Imagine a scene where a very young child is attempting to play with older children. The older child calls for the mother to come and take the younger one away saying, "He's no good! He can't play with us. He is too little." Because of the undeveloped perceptions of the younger child, he is not able to logically analyse that statement. The emotional belief input is that he is just not good enough. He doesn't reason that when he is older he will be as skilful at that activity as the older children are; he simply believes he is 'not good enough'. These are the unconscious belief systems that are being formed, and the thoughts and feelings we experience in response to these events continue into adulthood.

Within the mechanism of the conscious and the unconscious, a simple system of cause and effect is working. I believe that too many people complicate the human mind. The unconscious mind is born with its unconscious instincts for self-preservation and pleasure, but all the information used in its programming (to form beliefs) is received from the conscious mind. The memory bank in the unconscious gathers together all the information received during a lifetime and creates from it the subconscious belief system, which can be called a silent partner to consciousness.

The unconscious mind follows any belief impersonally and with equal efficiency. Much of life's creative process happens without our conscious knowledge. There are conscious and unconscious forces operating in our lives. The mind does not decide which thought it should act on. Whatever the conscious mind believes, whether the belief is true or not, the unconscious mind will act upon that belief. The unconscious follows any belief with equal efficiency – impersonally.

The Challenges Facing Youth

Parents, teachers, mental health professionals and clinical hypnotherapists can do a great deal to help youngsters recover from anxiety, stress, negative self-images or even trauma. Recognising when a child is stressed or anxious is a major first step in assisting them to deal with their emotions, thoughts, feelings or reactions. Typical reactions can include: separation anxiety, crying or whimpering, withdrawal or disruptive behaviour, lack of attention, irritability, fear, sleeping disorders including nightmares or night terrors, depression, stomach aches, nail biting or bedwetting (Goulding, 2004).

In extreme cases academic decline, depression, anti-social behaviour, trauma, and even suicidal thoughts can occur, and the list goes on. Some youngsters are more vulnerable to trauma than others. It has been shown that the impact of a traumatic event is likely to be greatest in the child or adolescent who has previously been the victim of child abuse or some other form of trauma, or who already had a mental health problem (Grbarino, Kostelny & Dubrow, 1991).

Balancing a Child's Belief Structure

A child's basic belief system is developed as a result of messages (suggestions) received from both parents. The ideal belief system is one in which (a) the child knows that s/he is unconditionally loved

and loveable, and therefore feels confident about returning that love, and (b) begins each day with a positive attitude of mind and the expectation that the day is going to be happy/a positive experience.

The Goulding SleepTalk® for Children Process was designed to facilitate the acceptance of positive suggestions directly into the unconscious mind, and to replace previously accepted negative suggestions. It takes only about two minutes every evening and generates results that last a lifetime. It also allows the parents or primary carers to develop a more positive relationship with the child; the 'down line ramifications' of change permeate through the entire family. This technique is most important when dealing with physically, emotionally or intellectually impaired children as the majority have very negative beliefs and self- image.

A process called the 'Top Hat' (Goulding, 2004) enables the unconscious mind to redefine its belief structure and accept alternate suggestions that become the new truth and reality. Not all children need this process but all will benefit from it.

The 'Top Hat' process is delivered by the parents or primary carers while the child is asleep. The technique accesses the unconscious mind at brainwave levels ranging from deep Alpha to light Theta (approximately 8-6 electro-magnetic cycles per second) rather than at the deepest levels of the sleeping cycle (i.e. the deeper levels of Theta brainwave frequency or whilst in Delta 0.5-3.5 electro-magnetic cycles per second).

The Reticular Activating System

The Reticular Activating System (or A.R.A.S., for Ascending Reticular Activating System) is the name given to the part of the brain (the reticular formation and its connections) believed to be the center of arousal and motivation in humans (American Psychological Association, 2009). Its function is to filter the masses of information being absorbed by the unconscious mind and to take particular note of any information that is relevant and important.

The 'Top Hat' Process activates the awareness of the Reticular Activating System (R.A.S.), allowing access to the most appropriate brainwave frequency for suggestions to be received and accepted without awakening the child or causing conscious and in many cases critical confusion.

The 'Top Hat' Process

The major objective of the 'Top Hat' process is for the parent to access the correct level of brainwave frequency while not interfering too much with the normal sleeping habits of a child. If suggestions were presented during this process while the brainwave frequency of the child was in the lower levels of Theta or Delta, then the suggestions would be of little value because one would be talking to a sleeping child without activating the R.A.S. awareness.

The following is a diagram description of the process. Whilst asleep, the conscious brain rests, but the unconscious mind always has a level of awareness. It is as though the unconscious mind has an antenna. What tells you to wake up? The antenna of the unconscious mind – the R.A.S. (See Figure 1.)

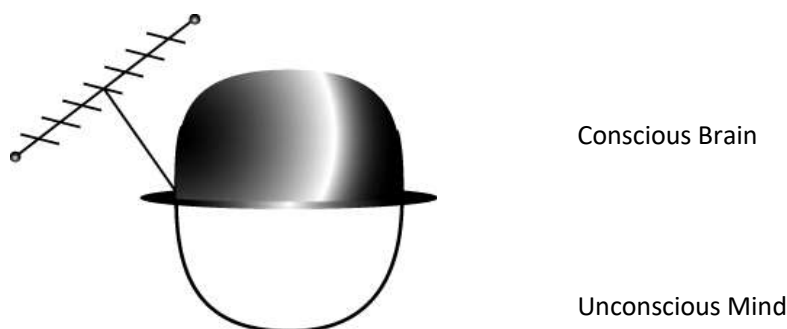


Figure 1. The Top Hat Process

For example, when your baby/child cries out in the night you will awaken even if you are two rooms away, yet you may remain asleep when a car backfires as it passes your house.

In the Goulding SleepTalk® Process you will "take off" the "Top Hat", the conscious brain of your child, and engage the correct brainwave frequency of your sleeping child by the simple physical action of stroking your child's head and speaking a few words. In doing so, you will be simultaneously alerting the R.A.S. to pay attention to relevant information. Your child's movement will indicate transition to the correct brainwave level, and you are then able to

communicate with your child's unconscious mind via this R.A.S. 'antenna' and deliver the Foundation suggestions. (See diagram 2.)

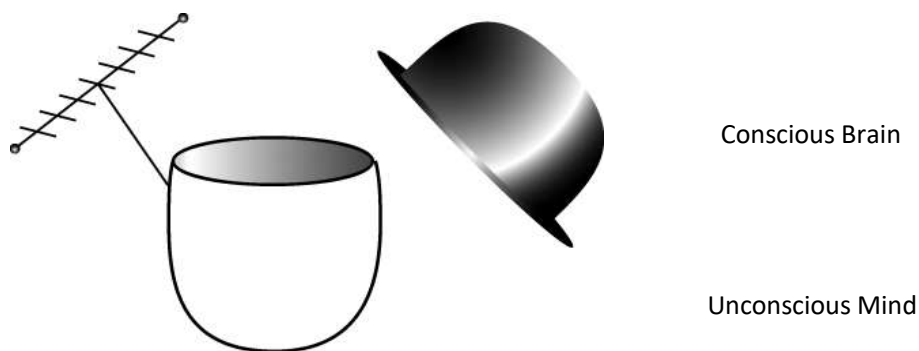
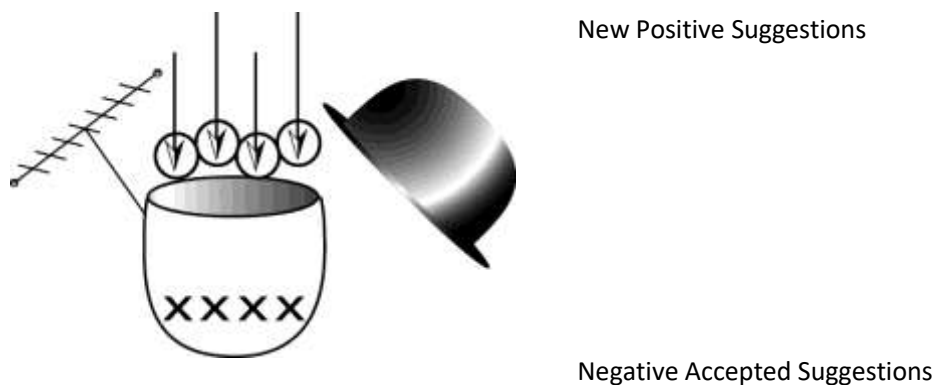


Figure 2. Taking the Top Hat off.

The process enables the parent to talk directly to the unconscious mind of the child without interference from the conscious brain, which may be influenced by any negative beliefs already accepted by the unconscious mind. (See Figure 3.)



- Figure 3. Talking directly to the Unconscious Mind.

At this particular point, what is said to the child is critical, so ensuring there are no external noises such as a radio or other people talking within hearing of the child is paramount. The phrases that are used have been researched and proven over 40 years to be the most beneficial and effective in the reinforcement of unconditional love and self-esteem. The outcomes resulting from this strong, positive foundation of belief have been very successful.

The positive phrases, when presented to the unconscious mind in this specific manner will be accepted without consideration or conscious critical analysis and hence possible rejection. They sit next to the previously accepted but negative beliefs in the unconscious mind of the child. (Figure 4.)

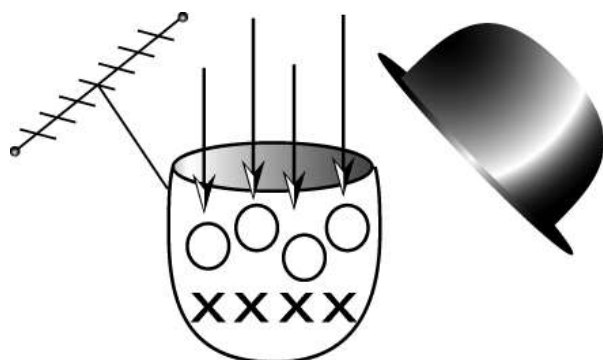


Figure 4. Positive phrases sitting next to previously accepted negative beliefs.

On the completion of this process, the child is returned to normal sleep. ie. The parent puts the "Top Hat" back on. (See Figure 5.)

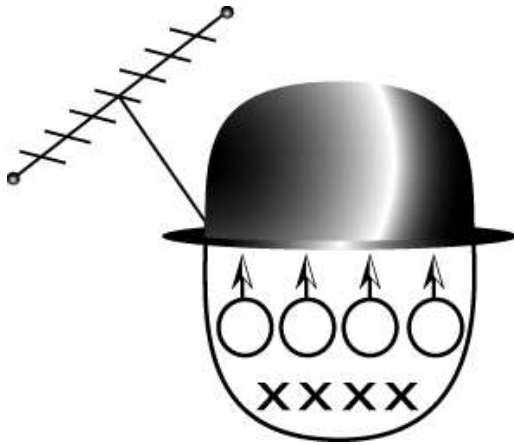


Figure 5. Put the Top Hat back on.

Over time the specifically repeated positive phrases will dominate and defuse negative beliefs, leaving the child with positive suggestions and thus creating a confident self-image rather than the previously accepted negative cognitive inoculations. Not only has the parent defused or replaced the negative emotions or issues, but in their place has presented a solid foundation of self-belief and confidence.

Another major advantage of this process is the development or reinforcing of positive communications between the parent and the child.

Case History

This case history was written by the mother of a seven year old child who was trying to deal with anxiety, trauma and fear. Names have been changed to protect confidentiality. Sincere thanks are offered to the parents for allowing their very personal journey to be shared.

Background

Young B was normally a happy and very active little fellow. During a six month period his grandmother was diagnosed with cancer and as a result his mother spent a lot of time away from the family home. Obviously the physical changes in B's most precious Nan were quite confronting for him. In addition, his family lived in a location that had been subject to a long drought and at this time the devastating effects both financially and emotionally of the drought were starting to become evident. Bushfires were only kilometres away and the farm was blanketed by smoke during the day for weeks, and flames from the fires could be seen during the night. On New Year's Eve during a massive storm, lightning hit a tree in one of the farm's paddocks and started a fire. With this came the immediate trauma of fire engines, panic and mayhem. As a result of this, the following trauma, recorded by B's mother, occurred.

- B would not sleep in his room on his own; he would wake screaming and become violent both verbally and physically when I was trying to put him back to bed.
- During the day he wouldn't go anywhere (inside or outside) without being able to see me and was very argumentative with all family members.
- B was very disruptive in the classroom, couldn't stay still or take instructions and actually fell asleep in class. He didn't respond to any form of teaching.
- February, I discovered the Goulding SleepTalk[®] for Children' process and began using the Foundation process.
- By mid-March, B was starting to go to sleep, but still with me sitting on his bed. He would at least sleep in his own bed all night and the teachers were reporting improvement in his behaviour at school.
- By the end of March, B's daytime 'tantrums' were becoming much less frequent and he was going to sleep on his own and sleeping all night.
- April: B continues to sleep well, and if he does wake in the night, he's happy to go back to sleep in his own bed. He is moving around on his own a lot better and he is responding to the teachers a lot more readily.
- May: Introduced 2 'specifics' with the help of Joane. "You are confident, positive and calm, learning is good, interesting and fun".
- June: End of school term and his parent/teacher interview was amazing. The teachers told us he'd improved 1000%.
- July: B continues to improve in all areas. He moves around, inside and outside, quite freely and independently and his general happiness is fantastic.
- Added to siblings' statements, "B loves you".

- October: B's behaviour is consistent, his cooperation with the family is fantastic and he adds valuable contributions to conversation and play.
- December: I have changed B's suggestion to 'You're safe, secure, confident, positive and calm. N loves you, you treat others as you would like to be treated'.
- Feb-May: I stopped SleepTalk® for these months and by May started to notice signs of regression in B's behaviour and sense of self. So I resumed SleepTalk® with almost immediate results just with the 'Foundation' process. The immediate results are nothing short of fantastic, with improvement continuing. No, I wasn't really surprised, but excited to enhance my experiences with SleepTalk® and so easily make an effective difference for my little man!
- Now I continue with SleepTalk®, only adding "N loves you" to the 'Foundation' process at this point. I am pleased with the feedback but will stick with this suggestion for a little longer. My next idea will be to reuse, 'You treat others as you would like to be treated'.

Mother's Comments: "Simply, this really is a two minute gift that lasts a lifetime. Where would my family be without the Goulding SleepTalk® process? Given the enormity of the primary reason for starting – the answer is: 'On the scrapheap with a mentally ill mother and similarly affected children'."

Conclusion:

Biopsychosocial aspects of stress, anxiety, education, emotional and physical issues are presented by clients to psychotherapists and clinical hypnotherapists every day, and looking beyond the presenting issues can be very beneficial. The down line ramifications of change that do occur as a result of utilising this process are a major step forward in assisting clients if situations at home are a contributing factor to their presenting issues.

The process is simple and easy to use and suits children of all ages from gifted to the talented and the challenged. Because it is non-intrusive, ethical and safe, with the benefits lasting forever, the SleepTalk® process is endorsed by the Medical and Psychological Professions.

It's not about whether all children need SleepTalk® but it's most certainly a given that they and their parents will benefit from it. The process works in conjunction with any therapy and allows professional consultants and clinical hypnotherapists to assist parents to help their children develop emotional resilience, the mind's firewall that protects against negative suggestions, much like a firewall on a computer protects it from outside interference and damage.

It's not what we leave to our children that matters; it's the knowledge we leave within their minds. With SleepTalk®, parents talk – children listen – waking happy in the morning. Children are our future and as parents we need to recognise this with a sense of urgency. If we are to take care of the children, we need to take care of the 'now'. This is a two minute gift that can create changes that last a life time.

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