

Promoting Safety in Hypnosis: A Clinical Instrument for the Assessment of Alertness

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TABLE 1
Howard Alertness Scale

Pre-Hypnosis

We are going to measure how alert you are at this time. This will be measured on a scale from 1 to 10. On this scale 1 represents a very low level of alertness, and 10 represents a very high level of alertness. To help you assess your level of alertness you will be asked to pay attention to different ways that you perceive your environment, and also to the way that you are thinking.

Take a moment now to notice how awake and alert you feel at this time. Gather information from all your senses:

- Look around you and notice the various things that you see. Notice how the images appear and the clarity, the color.
- Notice the sounds around you and the quality of whatever you hear.
- Notice the feelings in your body including the feeling of the chair against your body and the feeling of your feet against the floor.
- Notice how connected you feel to your body and how aware you are of your surroundings. Notice how present you feel in this time and place.
- Notice how clearly and logically you are thinking, and how your mind moves from thought to thought as you focus on different things around you.

On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is very low, 2 is low, 5–6 is medium, 9 is high, and 10 is very high, find the number that best describes how alert you feel right now.

(Circle subject's level of alertness)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
very low	low			medium				high	very high

Post-Hypnosis

On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is very low, 2 is low, 5-6 is medium, 9 is high, and 10 is very high, what number best describes how alert you feel right now.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
very low	low			medium				high	very high

The Howard Alertness Scale (HAS) is a 1 to 10 scale for measuring the subjective level of alertness experienced by an individual prior to and subsequent to the use of hypnosis.

TABLE 2
Howard Alertness Scale Instructions

Pre-Hypnosis

1. Interview subject and prepare subject for hypnosis in your usual fashion.
2. Before first induction, explain to subject that alertness is something that changes with hypnosis. You may explain that hypnosis is a special state in which attention is narrowed and a person may experience their environment and themselves in a different way. You may also add that everybody experiences changes in how alert they feel at different times.
3. Read the first paragraph of the Howard Alertness Scale sheet starting with “we are going to measure how alert you are at this time” and pause briefly before continuing with “take a moment now to notice how awake and alert you feel at this time” and continue reading in a normal tone as you go through the list of things that you are instructing the subject to notice or pay attention to.
4. After reading the last line, ask the subject to rate his or her level of alertness on a scale of 1 to 10 and circle the subject’s level of alertness on the paper.
5. Begin induction.

Post-Hypnosis

1. Engage subject in an open inquiry about his or her hypnotic experience and observe subject closely for objective evidence of alertness. Look for any change in his or her general appearance of alertness and observe breathing, body movement, eye movement, posture, and muscle tone. Notice speech and affect. Subjects with slower breathing, little spontaneous movement or speech and a fixed stare, or a somewhat slower response to inquiries or instructions may still be in trance. Subjects who appear very emotional or who show signs of negative affect may also be experiencing residual effects of trance.
2. Evaluate subjective level of alertness by asking subject how alert he or she feels on a scale of 1 to 10 and record this on the Howard Alertness Scale sheet.
3. You may remind subject of the things he or she should notice when reevaluating subjective alertness. For example, you may tell subject to look around and notice how things appear, how connected they feel to their body, and how clearly they are thinking as they notice different things around them.
4. If subject reports an alertness level less than the original number, or appears to be less alert, take measures to insure complete alertness. If the degree of decreased alertness is minimal this may be as simple as suggesting that they will gradually return to their original level of alertness and recheck after further discussion and grounding measures. If subject does not achieve an alertness level close to original alertness by subjective or objective measure then further alerting efforts are required.
5. With future inductions it may not be necessary to read the entire Howard Alertness Scale but simply remind subject that once again we will “take a moment to measure how alert you are at this time” and ask subject to rate his or her alertness on a scale of one to ten. It may be helpful to remind subjects to pay attention to their environment and the way that they are thinking as they do this.

Note. Instructions designed to help operators administer the scale and to sensitize the operator to making an objective assessment of the subjects’ alertness subsequent to realerting.