

ASCH LEVEL 1

Ego Strengthening in Clinical Hypnosis

Building inner strength, resilience, and resource mastery

Clara Christensen, PhD
ASCH Approved Consultant



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Learning objectives

1

Define ego strengthening

Explain how clinicians may use it in clinical practice.

2

Identify three types

Relational, direct supportive, and experiential resource-based approaches.

3

Describe at least three strategies

Select and apply beginner-level strategies in clinical hypnosis.

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DEFINITION

What ego strengthening means

WORKING DEFINITION

"Interventions that help a person recognize, access, experience, and use capacities that support coping, regulation, choice, and effective action."

Traditional language

The term emphasized strengthening the ego so the patient could manage symptoms and engage in treatment.

Contemporary language

Inner strength, resilience, resource access, self-efficacy, and mastery often describe the same clinical aim more clearly.

The term describes a therapeutic function. It does not mean the clinician supplies strength the client lacks.

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CLINICAL FUNCTION

Why clinicians use ego strengthening



Hope and expectancy

Treatment can feel possible and worth attempting.

Self-efficacy

The client experiences evidence of being able to respond effectively.

Regulation

Calm, steadiness, comfort, or distance becomes more accessible.

Treatment readiness

The client may feel better able to approach symptoms, procedures, or change.

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THREE TYPES

Three types of ego strengthening

A practical Level 1 framework

1. Relational and external

The therapeutic relationship, respectful confidence, structure, and collaboration support safety and possibility.

2. Direct supportive

Suggestions affirm coping, progress, steadiness, competence, and positive expectation.

3. Experiential and resource-based

Hypnosis evokes a memory, state, image, skill, future experience, or bodily marker that the client can use.

Most clinical work blends all three. The distinction helps us choose language and method intentionally.

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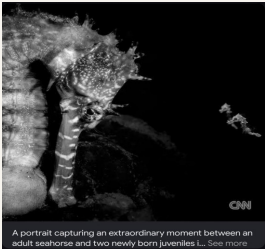
TYPE 1: RELATIONAL

The relationship can strengthen capacity

- Rapport provides safety, attention, and a context for trying something new.
- The clinician notices competence and reflects it accurately, without exaggeration.
- Collaboration protects agency: the client can accept, modify, or decline suggestions.
- Utilization treats the client's language, values, history, and spontaneous responses as resources.

EXAMPLE

"You have already shown something important by noticing what helps and telling me when an approach does not fit."



A portrait capturing an extraordinary moment between an adult seahorse and two newly born juveniles L. See more

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TYPE 2: DIRECT SUPPORTIVE

Hartland and direct supportive suggestions



Historical model

Hartland popularized repeated suggestions for greater calm, confidence, steadiness, and coping ability as part of hypnotic treatment.

Hartland's language

"As you become more settled, you may begin to notice greater confidence in your ability to do what you need to do, one manageable step at a time."

Updated example

"Each time you practice this skill, you can learn more about what helps your mind and body respond effectively."

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TYPE 2: DIRECT SUPPORTIVE

Generic suggestions and individualized suggestions

Generic

"Every day you will become calmer and more confident."

May offer reassurance and positive expectancy. It can also feel vague, implausible, or disconnected from the client's actual experience.

Individualized

"As you remember how you prepared for that difficult conversation, notice the steadiness you created by slowing down and finding the first sentence."

Links the suggestion to observable competence and a retrievable process.

Match confidence to evidence. Specific and believable language usually travels farther than praise.

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STRATEGY 1

Truisms and utilization

A truism begins with something the client can recognize as true, then links it to a therapeutic possibility.

LEARNING

"There have been many times when something unfamiliar became easier through attention and practice."

PERSISTENCE

"You have faced situations without knowing every step in advance, and still found the next useful step."

CASE

"The way you continue to care for others tells us something about commitment that remains available to you."

AGENCY

"Getting yourself here today required choices, effort, and some part of you that kept moving."

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TYPE 3: EXPERIENTIAL

Experiential resource activation

Recall

Reconnect with a real memory of coping, mastery, safety, or connection.

Amplify

Increase sensory detail and notice how the state appears in the body.

Name

Identify the quality or process: steadiness, courage, patience, focus, or choice.

Apply

Rehearse using the resource in a specific future situation.



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STRATEGY 2

Mastery memory and positive age regression



ELECTION

"Perhaps you can recall a time when you accomplished something you were not certain you could do, and through some combination of courage, support, practice, or persistence, you found a way."

DEVELOPMENT

"As you return to that moment, notice what you did, what helped, and where your body recognizes the experience of being able to respond."

Keep the memory manageable. The goal is resource access, not emotional intensity.

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STRATEGIES 3 AND 4

Future self and restorative resource states

Future self or age progression

Invite the client to imagine a realistic future in which the needed capacity is available. Explore what the future self does differently and what can begin now.

Example: "Notice the first small sign that you are handling this with greater steadiness."

Peaceful, connected, or awe-filled moment

Recall a moment in nature, relationship, creativity, movement, or quiet that evoked safety or perspective. Deepen absorption and identify the qualities it reveals.

Example: "The moment may have helped you notice a capacity for peace that remains part of you."

Choose the state that serves the treatment goal. Relaxation is one resource among many.

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STRATEGY 5

Anchoring a resource state



- Elicit**
Develop a clear, useful resource experience.
- Select a cue**
Use a word, image, breath, gesture, touch, movement, or object.
- Pair**
Introduce the cue while the resource is present and noticeable.
- Test and rehearse**
Let the state settle, reapply the cue, then future pace its use.

EXAMPLE
"As you press finger and thumb together, let that steadiness become easier to recognize and retrieve."

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CLINICAL SELECTION

Matching the strategy to the need

CLINICAL PRESENTATION	POSSIBLE STARTING STRATEGIES
Low confidence despite evidence of competence	Truisms, mastery memory, ratification
Anticipatory anxiety about a procedure	Direct supportive suggestion, resource state, future rehearsal
Hopelessness or limited future perspective	Small future-self experience, exceptions, achievable next step
Difficulty retrieving skills under stress	Experiential rehearsal and a tested anchor
Shame or sensitivity to praise	Relational accuracy, indirect recognition, client-generated wording

Selection begins with formulation: Which capacity would help, and how will the client know it is available?

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BRIEF DEMONSTRATION

Demonstration: recall, amplify, anchor, rehearse

A brief resource-strengthening sequence

- Participation is optional. Eyes may remain open or closed.
- Choose an ordinary, manageable memory of coping or mastery.
- Avoid highly emotional or traumatic material for this exercise.
- Notice what fits. Modify or disregard suggestions that do not fit.



INVITATION
"Let this be an experiment in noticing a resource that your mind and body already know something about."

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DEMONSTRATION DEBRIEF

Debrief

OBSERVATION

"What did you notice?"

HYPNOTIC PROCESS

"Which elements supported absorption: memory, imagery, sensation, suggestion, or rehearsal?"

CLINICAL APPLICATION

"What would you individualize for a particular client?"



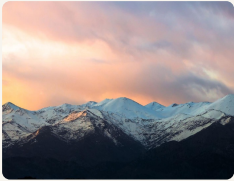
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INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Self-hypnosis supports resource mastery

- Keep practice brief, specific, and connected to a meaningful goal.
- Rehearse access to the resource before high-stress situations.
- Use the same cue consistently enough for learning to develop.
- Track what changes, even slightly, and adjust what does not fit.
- Pair internal practice with needed behavioral, relational, or medical care.



PRACTICE LANGUAGE

"Each brief practice can help you recognize the pathway more quickly and use it more deliberately."

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SUMMARY AND REFERENCES

Three ideas to retain

Questions and closing

Definition

Ego strengthening improves access to coping, regulation, choice, self-efficacy, and useful action.

Three types

Relational and external, direct supportive, and experiential resource-based approaches.

Strategies

Truisms, individualized suggestions, mastery memory, future self, resource states, anchoring, and self-hypnosis.

Selected sources

Hartland (1966), Hammond (1990), Barber (1990), Peterson & Seligman (2004), ASCH Standards of Training (2019)

Ciara Christensen, PhD, ciarachristensen@outlook.com

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