

HL | Uncommon Sense

It's a WASH



Firestein: No need to be afraid of mentalism

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Question: Dr. Beth, Recently, my kids have been watching a show called "Deception." This show depicts a hypnotist who says that he can place hypnotic suggestions on unsuspecting people to get them to act in ways he wants them to act. This has made me concerned about using meditation or hypnosis CDs, even though I have found them helpful in the past. Is it possible for someone to plant a suggestion that I am unaware of? Should I be concerned that CDs I purchase online could be dangerous to my mental health?

Answer: The show "Deception" features Keith Barry, who is a magician and a mentalist. Mentalism is not the same as hypnosis, but may involve elements of hypnosis. One internet definition describes mentalism in this way: "Mentalism is a field of magic that involves feats of the mind. Common mentalism effects include mind-reading; predicting the future; telekinesis, being able to move or alter objects without touching them; and being able to discern what objects are owned by a particular person and more."

Critics of the show "Deception" have expressed concern that magic tricks are being

presented as science and as though they are the same things as clinical hypnosis. There is no need to be afraid. While many programs on the Discovery channel are completely scientific, this program is amazing and fun to watch, but according to critics, it is entertainment, not science.

Although I do not understand magic or its sub-category of mentalism enough to explain it, I can offer you some information about hypnosis. According to the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, hypnosis is "a state of inner absorption, concentration and focused attention." Concentration and focus increase the effectiveness and potential for using the mind in helpful ways. The main uses for hypnosis are, 1) to encourage imagination and the ability to use mental imagery to help accomplish your goals; 2) as a state of consciousness for enhancing the effectiveness of suggestions (e.g. to stop smoking), and 3) for unconscious exploration — gaining insight into one's motivations and the personal meaning of events. Hypnosis allows us to do this in ways that are more in-depth than what our conscious minds might permit.

Like any tool, hypnosis can no doubt be used in positive and negative ways, so if

you wish to experience or use hypnosis as a healing tool you should definitely seek a credentialed and ethical professional. By and large, however, hypnosis cannot make a person engage in behavior that they would normally find morally objectionable. Meditation and hypnosis CDs are, by their nature, general in scope. It is always sensible to find stores or public libraries that contain a variety of these types of CDs and ask staff members for recommendations about which of these they have found most useful.

If you wish to learn more, the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH) is a legitimate professional organization for certified hypnotists and hypnotherapists (www.asch.net). The public section of their website contains a wide range of educational articles that explain what hypnosis is and how it is used in medicine and psychotherapy. They also have articles that debunk common myths about hypnosis. Your questions and concerns are quite legitimate; fortunately the answers are reassuring. And if you explore this fascinating tool using a bit of common sense, you and your children have nothing to fear.

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UNCOMMON SENSE WITH BETH FIRESTEIN

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