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## Unlocked memory helps to cure a long-standing fear of needles

By Marcia Nelesen

I have to admit skepticism about hypnosis.

Even so, Charlene Ackerman was happy to work with me on that, and I offered my son as a test.

That's not as cold-blooded as it sounds because, hey, I could have used a weight-loss session.

Dan, 18, gradually had developed a phobia surrounding needles.

He didn't know the root of the fear, but starting at age 8 or 9, he'd get anxious days before shots were scheduled. The anxiety would ramp into dread as the appointment neared.

The last time a nurse drew blood, he turned white, and I was afraid he'd bolt from the office.

When I proposed the hypnosis session, Dan was happy to give it a try.

Ackerman said hypnosis gets to the root of an anxiety.

During Dan's session, he sat in a large recliner. He said he remembers feeling relaxed as he listened to Ackerman's voice telling him to take deep breaths.

He couldn't tell how long he sat there and was surprised to hear later that the session lasted almost an hour. He described the feeling as "weird" but said he believes he remained aware of what was going on.

As Ackerman talked with him, Dan initially didn't remember any relevant incidents.

Then, "It just kind of popped up," he said.

He remembers thinking, "This is all I got, so I'm going to run with it. I hadn't thought of that forever. I just remembered it. It was kind of random."

Dan remembered being 5 or 6 and playing on the third floor of our home. He stepped on a stuffed animal that apparently had a pin in it. The pin stuck in his foot. We think it was a pin because he described it as a needle with a big head.

His dad pulled the pin out, but neither my husband nor myself remember the incident.

Later, Dan said he hadn't thought of the incident for a long time. But when he remembered it, he remembered it in vivid detail.

Two weeks later, he calmly laid down his arm for two shots he needed for college. He didn't squirm. Dan later said he didn't feel at all like he had in the past when he got shots, and specifically mentioned the lack of any nausea.

We both were a bit amazed and hope his phobia is over. Dan wasn't up for scheduling another shot just to check it out, though.

Now, about that weight loss session ...