



Sleep, Dreams... and Stress?

by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

Q: Dear Susie, I understand our dreams can sometimes help release stress and promote healing. I wish I could use dreams to work through conflicts. Is it possible that I just don't ever dream?

A: That's very unlikely. We dream each night and can actually train ourselves to recall dreams. Many people can "program" themselves at bedtime to explore an issue, release a concern or gain insight into a problem. Native Americans and other indigenous peoples held "the dream time" as sacred, often making community decisions based upon dream symbols.

Remember that dreams are often metaphors, (*e.g. a baby being born may relate to some kind of new beginning, or something very small, etc.*) Some have experienced precognitive dreams where one dreams of an event only to find shortly thereafter that the event has occurred. Some couples have experienced shared dreams where they awake and discover they have dreamed the same thing, even when in different locations. Dreams are a world unto themselves and we can, in fact, use them for conflict resolution. There are studies documenting spontaneous healings following dreams wherein the mind/spirit informs the body that a change is occurring. Of course the "chicken or the egg" question arises here, which warrants some exploration.

Try This:

1. Before retiring at night ask your unconscious to show you what you need to understand in your dreams. Write the question you'd like insight on in a journal by your bed. As you drift off to sleep, open your mind to the symbols and metaphors that guide us in dreams.
2. Upon waking, but before you are fully awake, record everything you can recall before it "evaporates." This transition period is sometimes referred to as the hypnagogic state. *Hint: Don't turn on the light or fully open your eyes until all the dream memories have been recorded your journal. If you find it difficult to write sentences in this groggy state, just a few related words may jog your memory later.* Like many self-awareness exercises, this takes practice. Try this for a couple of weeks and see if you begin to recall some snippets.

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