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Book Review: The Therapist's Notebook for Families: Solution Oriented Exercises for Working with Parents, Children and Adolescents.

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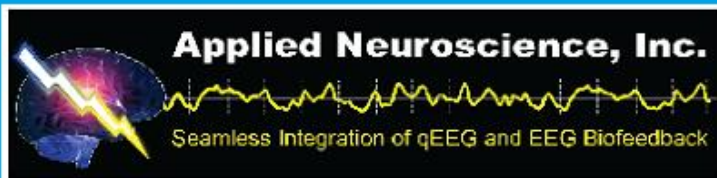
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BOOK REVIEW



THE THERAPIST'S NOTEBOOK FOR FAMILIES: SOLUTION-ORIENTED EXERCISES FOR WORKING WITH PARENTS, CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS. 2002. Bob Bertolino, PhD and Gary Schultheis, MA. New York: The Haworth Clinical Practice Press.

The stated purpose of this book is to help mental health professionals facilitate change in their clients with flexible, easy-to-use exercises. I think the authors met their purpose well. There are a wide range of exercises for both therapist and client to do in and out of the office. The exercises are thought provoking and nicely focused on creating flexible thinking, encouraging concrete, specific thought and on generating factual information coupled with specific plans for new actions in old situations. I would emphasize that these are exercises—things for the client to do—that may help a professional who is already trained in family therapy. If you have not had training and experience in the theory and practice of family therapy, I would not consider this book a good place to start your learning.

The authors take the currently mainstream position that therapy should focus the client on creating solutions for problems they define, rather than probing the past for imagined “reasons” the problems exist. The focus is on a very nice set of what I’d term “evocative” questions and exercises. Although the specific sources of the ideas are not identified, the reader will notice methods and ideas from cognitive behavior therapy, and from family therapists Jay Haley, Salvador Minuchin, Steven Deschazer, and Milton Erickson.

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The authors created a set of exercises that begin with the client defining the change they want and end with exercises aimed at insuring the change becomes stable in the long run. The exercises are often aimed at the therapist as much as the patient. For example in Chapter 12, *Changing Language through Acknowledgement and Possibility*, the authors suggest a series of ways of reframing or altering the client's initial statement (e.g., "Nothing ever goes right for me") to something that is less black and white (e.g., "Sometimes it seems like nothing goes right"). This may remind the therapist to challenge black and white maladaptive client statements, but it could also create a problem if it were copied verbatim by a well-intentioned but naive therapist. I could imagine a client responding to the reframe with "NO! I said, 'Nothing ever goes right for me.'" I like to actually explain to the client the framework I'm using, before I start using it. I explain the idea of avoiding black and white, self-defeating and outright discouraging, disparaging self-talk. I briefly educate the client in the way CBT approaches habits and automatic thinking (events trigger automatic thoughts, feelings and behaviors; creating and rehearsing new and more useful patterns solves problems). That way, when I reframe client sentences, it feels more like collaboration than a subtle, wise therapeutic thing to do that somehow gets the client to think in a more constructive way.

A therapist who does not have previous professional training in the Ericksonian, CBT, and/or Neuro-Linguistic Programming styles should be careful with this book, as it incorporates many, many excellent exercises that in fact are part of these larger frameworks. What is lacking is the backbone or theoretical framework to latch these exercises together. Without awareness of the full underlying framework, the naive therapist might be tempted to adopt these various formulae as if they were necessary and sufficient responses to the client, resulting in an overly rigid, and "cook book" flavor to the therapy. The therapist who is already deeply familiar with one or more of these therapy styles should find this book a pleasant refresher that may renew creativity and flexibility in both therapist and client.

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