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The Mindful Therapist: A Clinician's Guide to Mindsight and Neural Integration by Daniel J. Siegel, MD

Jacob D. Christenson ^a

^a Mount Mercy University Cedar Rapids , IA 52402 , USA
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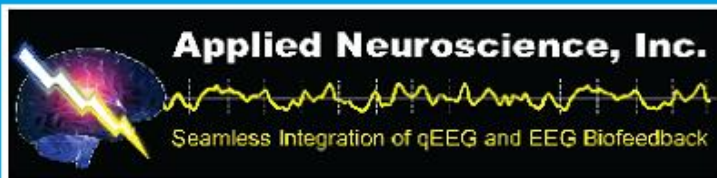
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BOOK REVIEW

THE MINDFUL THERAPIST: A CLINICIAN'S GUIDE TO MINDSIGHT AND NEURAL INTEGRATION. Daniel J. Siegel, MD. W. W. Norton, New York, New York, 2010, 265 pages, ISBN: 978-0-393-70645-1.

In the beginning of the book, Dr. Siegel indicates that his intent is to have this work serve as a guide for how clinicians as individuals can develop a more mindful approach to their work with clients. He accomplishes this by having a “personal conversation” with the readers, and directly relates the content to their role as a clinician. The use of this approach requires first-person application of the concepts as they are presented chapter by chapter.

Each chapter is more or less organized around four core facets of the concepts presented: (a) a description of the phenomenon the author wishes to discuss, (b) the ways this phenomenon is manifested in the functioning of the brain, (c) exercises that can be used to increase mindfulness in relation to the phenomenon, and (d) how the ideas in the chapter relate to integration. Organized in this way, the reader is able not only to arrive at an essential understanding about mindfulness but also to apply the content in a meaningful way to his or her own circumstances and personal growth. The journey that the author takes the reader through is the real value of the book, as without personal experience with mindfulness it is impossible to effectively facilitate the use of these skills in our clients.

Anyone who is familiar with Dr. Siegel's work will know that he is fond of using acronyms in his writing and teaching, and readers will find that this book is filled with them as well. The first three chapters deal with presence, attunement, and resonance, followed by a dozen chapters that start with a word beginning with *tr* (e.g., Truth, Trust, etc.), which leads to the dominant acronym PART

that is used throughout the book. Although the use of acronyms is at times distracting (as even acknowledged by the author), they serve the purpose of reinforcing critical concepts, and the utility of them is evident by the end of the reading.

In Chapter 1, presence is described as the openness toward ourselves, others, and life that provides the foundation for effective clinical work. Chapter 2 extends the conversation to attunement, which is reflected in our ability to attend openly to messages being sent by others. Chapter 3 describes how presence and attunement contribute to a feedback loop between individuals that facilitates connection or intimacy. Each of the concepts is backed up by research showing how these operate in the brain and practical exercises that guide the clinician through the process of individual application.

In the remaining chapters, additional layers are added to the discussion, such as the concept of “Trust” in Chapter 4. Trust arises naturally from resonance with another person, leading to connection and openness. Chapters 5 through 8 deepen the discussion of mindfulness by introducing the “awareness wheel,” which can be applied to develop our understanding of our internal world, as well as the internal flow of energy and information. In each of these chapters, readers are challenged to expand their capacity for mindfulness in increasingly complicated ways that are ultimately rich and rewarding.

Although the argument is made that mindfulness alone has a powerful effect on the clinician, in Chapters 9 through 11, Dr. Siegel addresses the aspects of the mind and brain that may not be as responsive. For example, Chapter 9 contains a discussion of “Traits” (another *tr* word), which are those genetically influenced characteristics that tend to be more

rigid. Chapter 10 contains a description of how trauma affects implicit memory and what can be done to promote integration of these disconnected features into an individual's awareness.

The final chapters provide a description of how continued efforts at mindfulness: (a) require concerted effort over time (Chapter 12, Training), (b) can lead to a positive change in all aspects of our lives (Chapter 13, Transformation), (c) result in a sense of peace (Chapter 14, Tranquility), and (d) ultimately allow us to transcend the limitations of a temporal existence (Chapter 15, Transpiration).

Through the application of practices outlined in the book, Dr. Siegel explains that individuals will be enriched as

we come to see ourselves as a part of a whole, a member of a continuity across time and space that grounds us in the present and links us to a larger reality of the flow of life. With the cultivation of mindfulness, we see ourselves with an expanded identity. Kindness and compassion are the breath of life, and integration liberates these fundamental ways of linking ourselves to one another. As we

cultivate integration in our internal and interpersonal lives, we not only nurture ourselves and our loved ones, but we open the mind to new possibilities. As we strengthen our collective connections through harnessing the power of mindfulness, we awaken our minds and widen our circles of compassion to truly embrace the sanctity of this wonder filled journey of life. (p. 259)

Given the content in the book, it seems entirely likely that this outcome is attainable to those who apply the information to their own lives. The author provides a rich description that will guide the clinician through this process of personal growth. Because this book expands the discussion of mindfulness beyond just technique by including information about the impact of these practices on brain functioning, the content will be of particular interest to neurotherapists. Accordingly, I would not hesitate in recommending this as an addition to any neurotherapist's library.

*Jacob D. Christenson
Mount Mercy University
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402, USA*