Reviews

Working with children and teenagers using solution-focused approaches: enabling children to overcome challenges and achieve their potential
Judith Milner, Jackie Bateman

This is an excellent tool for anyone working with children and their families. The authors are both solution-focused practitioners, trainers, consultants and writers. Previously a senior lecturer in social work, Judith Milner now acts as a therapist, consultant and independent expert to family courts in child protection, domestic violence and contested contact cases. Jackie Bateman was a former social worker in child protection and then youth offending, before joining Barnardo’s in 2002. She is currently a children’s service manager for Barnardo’s Junction Project, a service that works with children and young people who display sexually concerning behaviour, and their families.

The authors have deduced from their valuable work experience that a solution-focused approach offers proven ways of working with children to help them overcome a range of difficulties. This may be seen as an academic solution to a mental health problem; however, the tasks and the conversation techniques help the children to identify their own strengths and achievements.

The approach of solution-focused questioning allows the therapist to capture the child’s views, wishes and worries. This then encourages positive decision-making and helps the child overcome challenges and achieve their goals. Chapter three focuses on achievable goals, using simple questions that the child will easily understand: How will you know that meeting with me will be worthwhile? What will you notice? What are your best hopes? What will happen for you to know that our work is helpful to you? What will other people notice? The questions provide the child and therapist with clear goals and encourage the child to discuss what they will actually be doing once they achieve their goals, thus increasing their taking of responsibility.

All the chapters have easy-to-read sections that include case examples and practice activities, which I found very helpful and potentially thought provoking for my own clients. Also included is extensive coverage of issues surrounding safeguarding children and work within child protection. The points raised are clear and engaging. Case examples are provided that are thought provoking, leading to reflective practice.

The authors are very clear not to label the child as a problem, instead taking the child seriously and respecting them in their own right. They also reflect on the importance of the skill of the therapist, effective communication and engagement, covering all aspects that will encourage a good working relationship between client and therapist. I cannot praise the authors too highly for sharing their valuable knowledge and experience in such an effective way so that the reader is excited by the thought of using these skills within therapy work with young people.

Tarana Allen MBACP, therapist/counsellor in private practice.

Handbook of psychotherapy case formulation (2nd edition)
Tracy D Eells (ed)

Case formulation is not necessarily a dry subject, so it is a shame that this is such a dry, if worthy, book. There are 14 chapters, all differently authored (apart from the first and the last, written by the editor), and each one is written in the most academically dry style.

The stated aim is to fill the gap between the need for, and the lack of training in, case formulation. Eells has edited a handbook in which different contributors discuss their way of doing case formulation, which is intended to fill the gap. He asked contributors to comment on eight perspectives in their case formulation, including the historical background to the approach, the conceptual framework, multicultural and inclusion/exclusion criteria, a case example and research into the approach.

Eells defines case formulation as being a guess or theory about the causes of a client’s problems, which is then used as a blueprint for treatment planning, including the best way to develop a therapeutic alliance. (This is a huge over-simplification as Eells’ own definition runs to more than 100 words.) Some of the case formulations made my eyes water, they are so detailed and thorough. Several contributors mention a formulation team, which suggests they are working in a supported environment. For those of us who...

The Independent Practitioner Autumn 2011
work in private practice, attempting
such detailed analyses is not practical,
and I would have welcomed a chapter
that addressed this issue.

On the other hand, it is good to see
multiculturalism as a theme that runs
through each chapter, as well as having
a chapter of its own. Unfortunately,
some of the authors do not appear
to have grasped the complexities of
working multiculturally. The editor
himself comments on this in the last
chapter, which sums up the various
approaches.

This last chapter, written by the
editor, compares the other chapters,
using the same perspectives. For me,
this is the most interesting part of
the book, and I was sorry that I had
come to it at the end, rather than
the beginning of the book. By the
time I read it I already knew that
pretty much all the authors say the
same thing: that the steps in case
formulation are to collect data,
interpret data, apply data and see
if it works. If not, revise. That, in a
 nutshell, is what this book takes 432
pages to say.

Heather Dale FBACP (Snr Accred),
counsellor/psychotherapist in private
practice and senior lecturer, University
of Huddersfield.

A woman’s unconscious
use of her body: a
psychoanalytic perspective
Dinora Pines
 Routledge 2010
ISBN 978-1609181970  £50.95

If you are unfamiliar
with Messer
and Gurman’s
comprehensive
Essential
Psychotherapies,
then on first sight of
this third, updated
edition you could
be forgiven for classifying it as
‘reference only’ without delving much
deeper. Yet this would be a genuine
oversight. The book is both practical
and enlightening in terms of the depth,
breadth, excellence, and relevance of
the material it presents regarding
psychotherapeutic theory, practice and
research, both past and current, and
across modalities. It is a welcome
reminder of the responsibility of the
integrative practitioner.

Each self-contained chapter is
dedicated to one of 12 core
theoretical approaches, perceived by
the editors to be the ‘bedrock’ of
current training, practice and research.
The individual chapters are written
by leading academics and clinicians
in their fields who have succeeded
in presenting their material in a
thorough, clear, contemporaneous
and engaging way. We are skilfully
and consistently guided through the

Dinora Pines’
collection of
papers, which
are now republished,
continue to be as
profound and
innovative as when
they were first
published. She
focuses on significant moments and
transitions in women’s lives, providing
a psychoanalytic understanding of
women’s relationships with their
bodies. Although psychoanalytic in
essence, she brings new and creative
insights and understanding, that, on
occasion, are different from traditional
psychoanalysis, but without losing its
foundation. She takes us through the
female lifecycle, including
adolescence, pregnancy and childbirth,
infertility and abortion, menopause,
and old age. She also includes two
papers on the traumatic effects of the
Holocaust on survivors, and the
impact on the second generation.

As a woman and a therapist, I found
this book intriguing, gripping, and
useful. It triggered me to reflect
upon my own transitions and journey
through the lifecycle as a woman.
I found Pines’ open admission of,
and reflection upon, aspects of her
own lifecycle both refreshing and
comforting. The only weakness, in
my opinion, is a seeming assumption
of familiarity with psychoanalytic
terminology and concepts. Fortunately,
although not a psychoanalytic
psychotherapist, I do have a
foundational teaching in
psychoanalytic/psychodynamic
psychotherapy, so the book was
somewhat easy for me to understand,
although I needed to refresh my
memory on a few concepts. Even
without an understanding of the
psychoanalytic approach, however,
the book will probably make sense
to therapists of various orientations,
as much is explained in the text, and
there is a clear, succinct glossary.

I found it stimulating and informative
from beginning to end, and an essential
text for my learning as a therapist who
values working in a woman-centred
way with female clients, and also for
my understanding of my own body
and soul as I journey through my own
transitions as a woman approaching
midlife. I have plans to re-read and
study it further, as I believe it will
afford me more learning and deeper
insights on each reading and I hope
to incorporate these into my therapy
practice.

This is a much-needed text on the
subject of a woman’s physical and
intrapsychic journey, and how these
interrelate. I would recommend it
to female therapists of various
orientations, and feel it could also
be useful for male therapists
working with women, and for men
with female partners. It is a book
that requires an open mind in order
to embrace the depth of the female
lifecycle, and some very sensitive
and profound issues and aspects of
womanhood.

Roni Beadle MBACP, counsellor, dance
therapist and writer working in private
practice and for SEED (Support and
Empathy for Eating Disorders), a
charity in East Yorkshire.

Essential psychotherapies
(3rd edition)
Stanley B Messer, Alan S Gurman
(eds)
Guiford Press 2011
ISBN 978-1609181970  £50.95

Reviews