Psychotherapy


Reviewer rating: Good

Review by Lance Taylor, MSc, Karl Tomm, MD
Calgary, Alberta

This book provides 75 concrete exercises that mental health professionals can use to complement and enhance therapy. It is clearly oriented toward parents and their children, especially adolescents. For the most part, these exercises take the form of 1 to 3 sheets of specific questions with lined, blank spaces for family members to write in their answers. The focus is on enabling preferred reflections and greater awareness of positive developments and (or) possibilities. A few exercises encourage the creation of “certificates” and “letters of evidence” to document valued change.

Many of these exercises are recommended either for use in therapy sessions, where they will be completed by the therapist and family members together, or for use at home by families, where they will be undertaken collectively or individually. Each exercise is presented according to a standard format offering a therapist overview, suggestions for use, and the exercise itself. The authors designed the book to facilitate photocopying the exercises for clients. Most exercises invite clients to bring their answers to the next therapy session, suggesting an interplay between exercise and in-session conversation.

The collection of separate exercises is organized into 5 sections. Part 1, “Getting Clear on the Change You Want,” emphasizes clear, functional goals and exploiting client preferences for the therapy process. Part 2, “Changing the Viewing of the Problem,” offers exercises to help client families change how they think about and talk about their problems by using language that increases possibility and choice. Part 3, “Changing the Doing of the Problem,” has exercises oriented toward deliberate changes in actions. Part 4, “Changing Aspects of Context,” deals with contextual influences, such as culture, sex, ethnicity, and spirituality, that may cause the problem to persist or influence the development of solutions. Naturally enough, Part 5 is about “Keeping the Ball Rolling” and offers exercises to sustain and further positive change.

The book is oriented toward solutions and highlights the future, change, clients’ strengths and successes, the natural process of emotional and behavioural maturation, and the “in-between steps” to solutions. It appears to draw from both problem-solving and solution-building paradigms. One may guess that the authors are influenced by various models, including solution-focused therapy, narrative therapy, and the trans-theoretical model of change. Insight seems to be implicitly valued as a key to changes in perception and action. Most of the exercises are based on good, down-to-earth wisdom regarding how people and families work and how they behave in therapy. Rather than making prescriptive suggestions, many exercises create conditions for clients to discover useful resources and connections on their own. There is a generative work-book atmosphere to this volume. Almost anyone could usefully work their way through the exercises to facilitate some significant perceptual and behavioural shifts, depending on the intensity with which they are engaged.

Possible shortcomings of the book may be that it offers very little theory and that some exercises require a relatively high level of cognitive and linguistic sophistication. At times, the name of the exercise does not quite match the content. As the authors themselves point out, it is important to view the exercises as supportive adjuncts and not the backbone to effective therapy. The authors suggest that the exercises are compatible with a broad range of mental health practices. However, they probably best fit those professionals who believe clients and families have natural resources of their own that are worth identifying and mobilizing to effect therapeutic change.


Reviewer rating: Excellent

Review by George Voineskos, MD
Toronto, Ontario

This splendid book contributes to the enormous interest that has developed over the past 10 years in first episode psychosis and early intervention services. It is meant to be used as a source of
important information: the erudite, concise description of several early psychosis services in different countries and the provision of Web sites, e-mail contacts, and a large number of references fulfill its stated purpose.

The authors have gained a wealth of experience directing the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Center (EPPIC) at the Department of Psychiatry, University of Melbourne. This centre was started in 1984 as an inpatient service and gradually evolved into an excellent paradigm of service for first episode psychosis.

In the 1990s, several services for early psychosis—usually for patients between the ages of 12 to 14 years and 25 to 29 years—were started in Canada, the US, Europe, and South Africa. Recently, planning for such services has taken place in the Far East. In England, the Department of Health has since 2001 required that early intervention services, established according to specified guidelines, be available across the country. The prevailing view is that early detection and treatment of psychosis in young people will increase engagement, improve outcome, and reduce deficits in social functioning that set a “ceiling” for recovery.

The book has 9 chapters and 3 appendices. Chapter 1 summarizes the benefits of early detection of new cases, of early intervention, and of providing optimal and sustained treatment during the highly vulnerable “critical period” following recovery, which can extend for up to 5 subsequent years. Chapters 2 to 4 detail key service elements, including early recognition, initial assessment and treatment, and promotion of recovery. In these chapters, the authors draw on their experience with EPPIC to emphasize the pivotal role of effective engagement; of the first experience with medication; of treatment at home, if resources permit it, or of minimizing negative impact on the individual, if hospitalization is required; and of psychoeducation and cognitive therapy. Subsequent outpatient case management, family work, social treatment, and vocational rehabilitation are detailed. Chapter 5 describes 5 different models of early psychosis services, starting with EPPIC. The other 4 services were developed in the mid-1990s and comprise a service in Norway and Denmark, a service in Birmingham and in West Midlands, UK; and 2 services in Canada, namely, the Early Psychosis Program (EPP) in Calgary and the Prevention and Early Intervention Program for Psychosis (PEPP) in London, Ontario, both of which began in 1996.

Chapters 6 to 9 constitute the second half of the book and deal with strategies for an early psychosis service development, a process that may take 2 to 3 years, according to the authors. Chapter 6 describes a 9-step model for service development and includes examples from several services. Chapter 7 deals with evaluation, which is essential to service survival. Chapter 8 discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the specialist vs the generalist service model. The First Episode Psychosis Program at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at the University of Toronto, developed in 1992, is described as an example of an integrated inpatient–outpatient program. The chapter ends with organizational and professional development issues. Chapter 9 contains a consensus statement on the principles and practice of treating first-episode psychosis. Appendix 1 contains useful psychoeducation resource material for early psychosis. Appendix 2 summarizes the Australian best-practice clinical guidelines for first onset psychosis. Appendix 3 outlines the European First Episode Schizophrenia Network consensus on optimum first episode care.

The authors have done a commendable job in this book and have explained the rationale of early psychosis services for young people admirably well, while calling for ongoing evaluation. However, controversy has already reached professional publications in the UK, based on the premise that services for early psychosis either drain resources away from traditional services or lack staff with the required specialized intervention skills (1,2). Nevertheless the notion of offering specialized services to the young who may suffer from psychosis is irresistible.

The book is concise, clear, and easy to read. Its layout is attractive, with boxes in pink highlighting descriptions or other important points. The production is free from errors, and the price is reasonable. I highly recommend this book to all those working in, or interested in, the mental health field.

References


General Psychiatry


Reviewer rating: Excellent

Review by Matthew Robillard, MD North York, Ontario

This book’s thorough and current discussion of many important aspects of dementia is a major contribution to dementia research. In this new edition, a
distinguished group of medical authorities from all over the world—including many who have done seminal research in the field—discuss the spectrum of dementing disorders and explain their overlap, presentations, and differential diagnosis. They present original data as well as material from their clinical experiences. Current classification systems are evaluated and modified to better account for common dementia presentations.

Thoroughly revised, updated, and expanded, this second edition includes new material on neuroimaging, genetics, the role of inflammation retrophylogenesis (which is a new memory framework), and AIDS dementia. In addition, each chapter includes a new section describing clinical applications.

The authors have performed a valuable service in documenting the pitfalls in our current understanding of dementia. This book fulfills the purpose for which it was written and will interest researchers, academicians, psychologists, neurologists, and psychiatrists.

The authors of many chapters are well recognized for their academic contributions. Dr T Oxman, one of the editors, has written a chapter entitled, “The Spectrum of Dementias: Construct and Nosologic Validity.” I found this chapter well written and interesting. At the end, Dr Oxman identifies 4 potentially salient areas for advancing the field of dementia research, in terms of construct and experimental validity. They are the relation of dementia to normal aging changes, attention to confounding variables, functional impairment and quality of life, and biological markers in dementia.

Dr O Emery, the other editor, has written a chapter entitled “Retrophylogenesis of Memory in Dementia of the Alzheimer Type: a New Evolutionary Memory Framework.” This chapter offers a theoretical and empirical discussion of memory deficits of the Alzheimer type. Data are presented suggesting that dementia of the Alzheimer type (DAT) involves a process she terms “retrophylogenesis” because the last memory structures to evolve in phylogenesis are the first to deteriorate in dementia. A new 3-tiered evolutionary memory framework is introduced, wherein each tier originates in a different period in phylogenetic history: motor memory, emotional memory, and neocortical memory. The concept “retroontogenesis” is introduced in the context of neocortical memory in DAT. This chapter has been thoroughly researched, and the number and quality of the references indicates that much serious thought has gone into its writing.

For many people, including myself, the 37-page chapter discussing approaches to treating dementing illness is particularly important and interesting. Brief descriptions of cognitive enhancers, antidepressants, antipsychotics, anticonvulsants, benzodiazepines, and other anxiolytics are included. However, clinicians interested in learning more about how to decide when to start treatment, how to select a particular agent, how and when to switch agents, and how to decide about the length of treatment will have to look elsewhere.

This is a reference book, and the style is formal and scholarly. I liked the brief description of key topics and ideas at the end of each chapter. The book’s mostly grey cover maps out a portion of the galaxy or entity wherein there is an opportunity to explore and to learn more: I congratulate Mr Holman, the designer of the book jacket, on his style and creativity.

I continue to reflect on whether the price of any book can be considered “reasonable.” Certainly, this book will have different importance for different people, and certainly, the relevance of price varies with one’s financial position. The book is clearly an excellent reference text for those exploring both the uncharted areas of research and some of the clinical aspects of dementia.