

Book Reviews

Manage Your Mind: The Mental Fitness Guide (2nd ed.)

Gillian Butler and Tony Hope

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. pp. 499. £14.99 (pb). ISBN: 0-19-852772-5.

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Twelve years after the first edition, Gillian Butler and Tony Hope have published the second edition of their book *Manage Your Mind*, aimed at allowing the reader to discover practical ways to “improve many aspects of (one’s) life” (p. 3). The authors’ intention is to provide lay people with a step-by-step guide to enhance their psychological fitness and, in the introduction, Butler and Hope actually compare their book to a cookbook giving precise recipes to show the reader what do at each stage on their journey towards increased psychological well-being.

The authors set themselves the big challenge to familiarize their audience not only with skills to start tackling psychological difficulties such as panic attacks, phobias, depression and anger, but also to be more effective in their working life e.g. by learning how to improve memory and enhance problem-solving skills and time-management.

The book is divided into seven parts. Following two very short introductory chapters on how to use the book and some comments on the background of behavioural and cognitive therapies, from which many of the techniques are derived, Part 1 focuses on “Valuing Yourself” and “Recognizing That You Can Change”, which the authors see as the core principles for mental fitness. Part 2 tries to teach “Seven Basic Skills”, ranging from problem-solving, relaxation training, to keeping things in perspective and building self-confidence. Part 3 addresses relationships in the wider sense, including anger in relationships and sexuality. Part 4 is titled “The Twin Enemies of Good Mood” and features chapters on anxiety, panic, phobias, stress and low mood. Traumatic events such as loss and bereavement as well as past and recent traumatic events are covered in Part 5. Part 6 is called “Mind and Body” but does not – as the name might suggest – address issues around health anxiety and “non-organic physical symptoms” but focuses on addictions, including problematic drinking, sleep problems, as well as habits in general and eating habits in particular. “The Working Mind” constitutes the last part and gives guidance on how to study more effectively, improve memory, make decisions and to avoid thinking errors. The remaining pages list about 70 suggestions for further reading and 12 websites related to the topics featured in the book.

The layout of the book is similar to a modern school book with a reader-friendly font, bullet points and summaries at the end of each chapter. The authors have also included quite a few examples from “real life” that are helpful in normalizing experiences the reader may struggle with and clarifying explanations in the book.

By the very nature of the book – trying to cover a wide range of topics – it is different from most self-help books on the market that offer ways to cope with and overcome one particular psychological symptom or disorder such as depression or panic attacks. Moreover, in covering so many topics it is only natural that one of the main difficulties for any author is to decide how much space to allocate to each topic. Butler and Hope mostly get it about right, although anxiety

problems appear a bit short-changed compared with, for example, “Improving Your Memory”. Half a page is dedicated to a very basic list of a variety of sexual activities such as flirting, kissing, hugging etc. and the same list also reveals to the reader that “sexual attraction and interest can be shown walking, sitting, dancing, or eating”. Obsessive-compulsive behaviour, however, only gets a few lines within the chapter on habits.

Overall, the book provides some helpful guidance on increasing psychological fitness and on which initial steps to take to address common psychological difficulties. In some ways it feels as if the group potentially benefiting most from the book may be adolescents interested in gaining insight in how they can cope with everyday mental demands. Staying with the authors’ analogy of a cookbook providing step-by-step recipes, this book is more for people who have little experience in cooking and want to have some basic introduction on how to prepare food. It is not a book for someone who wants or has to prepare a complicated meal for special occasions.

AXEL WUERZ

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Handbook of Cognitive-Behavior Group Therapy with Children and Adolescents: Specific Settings and Presenting Problems

Ray W. Christner, Jessica Stewart and Arthur Freeman (Eds.)

New York: Routledge, 2007. pp. 552. £31.00 (hb). ISBN: 978-0-415-95254-5.

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I was interested in reviewing this book as the service I work in has now expanded to incorporate the adolescent age group. I was particularly interested in thinking about the specific needs of the adolescent age group and the similarities and differences with the adult population.

From the outset, the editors’ stated intention is to provide a comprehensive resource that presents not only theory, but also captures the innovative practices of CBGT in a variety of settings. The book sets out to provide an overview of the theory of CBT, the principles behind using it in a group setting, and specific strategies to use with young people. This book is helpfully divided into four parts, with 42 contributors; it addresses group therapy essentials, specific settings, presenting problems, and conclusions and future directions.

The introductory chapters provide useful advice on the components of effective group therapy. There is a useful checklist for “effective group therapy” that includes 13 items ranging from “clear and measurable goals for treatment” to “preparing for problems to occur”. An essential chapter on developmental factors highlights the wide range of complex, often changing and evolving factors that need to be taken into account when working with children and adolescents. There is an outline of developmental considerations incorporating biological, genetic and neurological influences. In particular, account is taken of possible hormonal effects on cognitions, affect regulation and behaviour e.g. polycystic ovary syndrome, which can be misdiagnosed as a mood disorder, or hypothyroidism, which can present as apparent depression, for which certain antidepressants are contraindicated.

There is also a useful chapter on legal and ethical issues that are important to clarify at the outset of a group, for example in terms of confidentiality and age as to what is shared with parents and guardians, and also issues of consent. How issues are dealt with when they arise, for example disclosure of drug use, and legal boundaries need to be clear from the outset.