

## Book Reviews

### **Overcoming your Workplace Stress: A CBT-based Self-help Guide**

Martin R. Bamber

London: Routledge, 2011. pp. 232, £16.99 (pb). ISBN: 978-0-415-67178-1

doi:10.1017/S1352465813000106

This book is a straightforward self-help guide that equips readers with a better understanding of what stress is, what causes it and how it can be managed. The guide is well structured, divided into three clear parts, and presents information in a logical and accessible manner. Interventions on how to overcome occupational stress are addressed at multiple levels, from making simple alterations to the physical working environment to changing the way we think about ourselves and our work. This book is ideal for anyone experiencing work-related stress who wants to achieve lasting results using cognitive behavioural techniques.

Part 1 of the guide serves to promote our understanding of the stress concept, its causes and its consequences. Chapter 1 introduces the transactional model of stress and gives an overview of the sequence of physical and mental changes that can result from stress. It is emphasized how, although short-term and low to moderate levels of stress can be beneficial to performance, long term unmitigated stress is harmful to both physical and mental health. A particularly helpful feature of this chapter is a stress quiz, which allows the reader to dispel any common misconceptions about stress. There is also a checklist that enables the reader to quickly assess his or her own current stress levels. Chapter 2 addresses the main causes of stress, both at individual and environmental levels. Again there is a questionnaire to enable the reader to quickly identify the main causes of stress in their own working environment.

In Part 2 of the book (Chapters 3–10) a range of interventions for tackling mild to clinical levels of stress are addressed. Primary interventions are introduced as strategies aimed at removing the source of stress: from enhancing physical comfort in the office to improving working relationships. Secondary interventions are introduced as coping skills and strategies to help buffer an individual against an inherently stressful environment, including tips on improving time management, being more assertive, and developing cognitive coping skills. This includes using thought diaries or conducting behavioural experiments to challenging unhelpful thoughts or beliefs. Chapter 10 concludes Part 2, with a more formal introduction of cognitive and behavioural techniques aimed at tackling clinical levels of distress (tertiary level interventions). Strategies such as shifting focus of attention, dropping safety behaviours, systematic desensitization and activity scheduling are described as a means of managing anxiety, depression and anger. Helpfully, any resources for using such techniques, such as a thought diary, can be downloaded from the internet.

Part 3 (Chapters 11 and 12) serves as a Pulling it All Together section, whereby the reader is provided with a step-by-step guide to formulate a self-help treatment plan. Here the user learns how to implement the interventions described in Part 2 in a logical and systematic manner.

Chapter 11 helpfully includes a detailed case study to illustrate how to go about identifying the main problems, setting goals, planning interventions and monitoring progress. Helpful case studies are used throughout the book. Part 3 concludes with an excellent Summary and Conclusions chapter, which gives a succinct overview of the content and main learning points of the guide.

Overall, this guide is very user-friendly, with an engaging and conversational tone. It is highly interactive, making use of an excellent range of resources throughout, including quizzes, checklists and questionnaires. The author does well to normalize stress and present it as a problem for both the employee and the employer (in terms of loss of productivity). This guide empowers individuals to become their own therapist so as to overcome the very common and serious problem of occupational stress.

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### **Overcoming Perfectionism**

Roz Shafran, Sarah Egan and Tracey Wade

London: Robinson Publishing, 2010. pp. 308, £10.99 (pb). ISBN: 978-1845297428

doi:10.1017/S1352465813000118

Perfectionism is a personality trait that involves rigidly and unrealistically requiring absolute perfection of the self and/or other people in most (if not every) important life domain. Not surprisingly, perfectionism is a risk factor for and a maintenance factor in mood, anxiety, and eating disorders. It is therefore important that therapists are able to conceptualize, assess, and treat perfectionism.

This excellent book was written as a self-help guide for lay persons who wish to address their perfectionism independent of professional assistance. Overcoming perfectionism through a self-help guide alone may be difficult. Perfectionism is a moderately heritable, temporally stable personality trait that is hard to treat. Such obstacles, however, do not discount the importance and the usefulness of *Overcoming Perfectionism*. This book can be much more than a self-help guide. We believe this book is a valuable resource for therapists with a cognitive behavioural (CB) orientation. Our review is directed toward such therapists.

*Overcoming Perfectionism* uses an accessible format. Early content provides the reader with an understanding of perfectionism from a therapist's perspective. The authors also identify perfectionistic behaviours detrimental to mental health and explain why these behaviours are not requisites to success. Before the treatment protocol is covered, a CB model is outlined describing how perfectionistic thoughts and behaviours lead to negative outcomes. This is a key component, because the subsequent approach to overcoming perfectionism stems from this model.

In line with CB models of mental health, the treatment protocol aims to identify and to remediate perfectionistic thoughts and behaviours. This book provides very useful exercises outlining costs and benefits of changing perfectionism, self-monitoring exercises, and diaries to increase awareness of positive outcomes. A wide variety of behavioural experiments are also provided, allowing perfectionists to test the practicality and the effect of non-perfectionistic behaviour. This book also provides worksheets to assist perfectionists