

Book Reviews

Overcoming Depression for Dummies

Elaine Iljon Foreman, Laura L. Smith and Charles H. Elliott

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Although the title of this book may be slightly disconcerting to some, the well known “Dummies” format lends itself well to a self-help book for depression. The authors skilfully present a wealth of information on all aspects of depression with a focus on learning and mastering cognitive techniques to improve mood. Not only is this book informative, it also approaches the topic in an empathic and normalizing manner, with occasional light-hearted touches with which readers of other books in the Dummies series would be familiar.

The book is divided into seven sections. The first provides an overview of different types of depression and, usefully, a discussion of the different types of help that may be available, including an explanation of the different styles of therapy and how to access them. In this first section, cognitions relating to reluctance to change (change blocking beliefs) are discussed in a frank and open manner, setting the tone for the rest of the book.

The second section of the book covers the cognitive approach to depression. This section introduces the main techniques in cognitive therapy, including evaluating automatic thoughts and noticing cognitive distortions, with examples and anecdotes to illustrate. This section also contains a very clear chapter on schemas, together with exercises for altering schemas. Although schema work may seem ambitious for a self-help book, the chapter introduces the topic gently with suggestions for further reading.

The third section focuses on behavioural approaches to depression. In keeping with the overall tone of the book it emphasises normalising, and provides an empathic description of how activity levels can be affected by depression and how these levels of activity can be increased. Again, it addresses barriers and difficulties in a clear and candid manner with practical strategies to increase levels of activity and manage low motivation. The section ends with an excellent chapter on problem solving, with a clear guide on how to employ this approach.

The fourth section looks at grief, loss and changing relationships using techniques from interpersonal therapy, and as in previous sections, these chapters provide a considerable range of practical techniques for the reader to use. The fifth section covers information about medication, both prescribed and complementary. The focus of these chapters is to provide enough information for the reader to come to their own decision about medication, rather than actively encouraging or discouraging this type of treatment.

The sixth section of the book focuses on relapse prevention, using ideas from standard cognitive therapy (e.g. awareness of potential triggering situations and developing relapse prevention plans) and introducing mindfulness based approaches. Additionally, a chapter on positive psychology introduces the concept of aiming for happiness rather than merely seeking to maintain a “non-depressed” mood. The final section is the “part of tens”, again a common feature of the Dummies range, and includes sections on 10 ways to help a child, friend or partner who has depression.

Overcoming Depression for Dummies is a comforting and empathic self-help text. A particularly successful feature is the combination of information with techniques and tools to address depression. As such, this text is an extremely comprehensive guide for someone who wants to learn more about depression itself and the main cognitive and interpersonal techniques to address depression. The comprehensiveness of the volume does however mean that, at times, the book can feel a little dense and it may take time to grasp the key concepts. The book uses its own terminology (e.g. “thought catcher” and “putting the thought on trial”) and even though these terms make intuitive sense, it takes a while to become familiar with them.

As with any self-help material, this book could be used in a range of ways. There are several chapters or sections that could happily stand alone, and individuals with depression may derive great benefit from merely dipping into parts of the book, although ideally the book (and particularly the cognitive and behavioural sections) would be worked through in a systematic manner. This text may be particularly suited for use in guided self-help interventions as provided by Low Intensity Workers in the new IAPT services.

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Therapy To Go: Gourmet Fast Food Handouts for Working with Adult Clients

Clare Rosoman

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Clare Rosoman's *Therapy to Go* provides a variety of handouts and worksheets for clients in a readily-accessible format. The resources are designed to be used by a range of therapists, including counsellors and psychologists, to augment their work. The development of the resources has been influenced by different therapeutic orientations, particularly cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), narrative therapy and solution-focused therapy.

The book is divided into “Appetisers”, “Starters” and “Dessert”. Appetisers includes a brief introduction to the intended use of the book and a description of how worksheets can complement therapy. Starters includes worksheets about general therapeutic issues (including rapport building and motivation) and therapy basics (including worksheets about CBT, goal-setting and problem-solving). This is followed by specific sections on anxiety, depression, anger and communication skills. Finally, Dessert includes sections on self-esteem and resilience (including relapse prevention). The format of the book works well. Each set of handouts and worksheets is preceded by a brief and helpful description of their content and intended use, meaning it is easy for the therapist to familiarize him or herself with each resource before considering using it with a particular client.

The book provides creative ways to explore a wide-range of general therapeutic issues and specific problems. I found the handouts and worksheets on confidentiality, goal-setting, identifying enjoyable activities and thought challenging particularly useful. The best feature of this book is that it contains such a vast range of photocopiable resources in a single place. The topics covered are so wide-ranging that it would take a busy therapist a considerable time to develop a similar set of resources of their own.