

Emotion–Focused Counselling: A Practitioner’s Guide (2017) by Michelle A. Webster. Annandale, Australia: Annandale Institute, ISBN: 9780648048404

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Reviewed by:

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This easy-to-read text book represents the culmination of over 40 years of Michelle Webster’s work as a front line psychotherapist, and in particular her last 23 years of works as an emotion–focused therapist, supervisor, researcher and trainer.

Comprising 24 chapters, the book not only provides an in-depth introduction to the theory and practice of emotion-focused counselling but also outlines that which is of critical importance to practitioners: how to do it!

Chapters One and Two introduce the author, placing her in the context of the Australian counselling scene from the 1970s right up to now. It also outlines the concerns she identifies with the earlier counselling models she used and her rationale for moving toward Emotion–Focused Therapy (EFT) as her preferred modality. This is a useful beginning as it helps to credential the writer and locate her in terms of the reader’s own experiences and practice concerns. An important point is that this book is focused upon the shorter form of Emotion-Focused Therapy.

This book is important because, outside of academic articles published by Michelle Webster and her colleagues, this is the first book to outline the Annandale model of EFT. To my eye it is a much more user-friendly text than most of the Canadian books because of its easy to read style and its practice-informed interpretation of what can, at times, be dense theory.

The chapters of this book bear the mark of the writings and reflections of both an expert practitioner and academic. Too often other texts are written by academics who have great theoretical insights and may conduct some practice but not enough for their reflections to be useful to a practitioner engaged in the complexities of therapy. This text is theoretically rich but written through the eye of a practitioner who understands the intricacies of practice, including the tensions and challenges of therapeutic engagement and assisting distressed clients to work on tasks to help their healing journey.

Chapter Three provides an in-depth overview of EFT as a humanistic experiential modality. It describes its history, with particular homage given to Leslie Greenberg and his Canadian colleagues, Robert Elliot, Sandra Paivio and Jeanne Watson. The chapter outlines EFT's treatment goals and explains the centrality of emotions and emotional experience in the therapeutic process. It also articulates the relational stance of EFT. The chapter also introduces the Annandale approach to EFT, highlighting differences between it and the Canadian models as well as offering reasons for the adaptations and extensions that have been made at Annandale. In doing this it poses some critical questions about the model that haven't been fully explored, to date, in the academic literature.

The main body of the book contains three sections. Section One explores assessment, Section Two session protocols, and Section Three methods for working with emotional experience.

Section One contains chapters four to eight. These chapters outline EFT protocols and tools for assessing clients and their interpersonal patterns, intrapersonal patterns and other 'self' experiences – both current and past. These are comprehensive and well developed chapters that are surprisingly easy to read given their theoretical depth. The chapters describe the origin of the methods, outline the steps in each protocol and provide both long and short case studies and transcripts to exemplify the method. Each chapter is accompanied by an extensive reference list, as well as hints and tips for executing the methods, and are practitioner-friendly.

Chapter Eight is worth a special mention as it outlines the concept of emotional signature, a notion unique to Michelle Webster's research and theoretical thinking, and not found in the other EFT models. Emotional signature is a term that refers to descriptions of the patterned ways that individuals relate to themselves and others; or their emotional responses, types of thinking and idiosyncratic behaviours. These ways of feeling, thinking and acting indicate different emotional schemes. The concept of emotional signature has emerged from over 20 years of research at the Annandale Institute, beginning with practitioner observations and culminating in large scale empirical studies. The concepts associated with emotional signature provide practitioners with strategic ways of relating to clients with different signatures, as well as working with and intervening in the unique templates or emotion schemes of clients. This is a critical piece of theory and technique, as one of the key goals of EFT is to transform the emotional schemes of clients to enable them to operate as their emotionally-authentic selves – to actualize their human potential.

Section Two contains Chapters Nine to Sixteen. These chapters explore how to develop a therapeutic relationship and undertake therapeutic tasks. It includes a 'how to guide' for Session One, as well guidelines for on-going sessions and between session tasks. Chapter 16 offers a particularly valuable overview of micro-skills, a much underrated but infinitely valuable part of the counsellor's toolkit. While Section Two is written with EFT in mind, it has universal application and is worthy of review by practitioners favouring other methods. Once again, the chapters are filled with rich clinical examples, hints and tips

that are especially helpful. These chapters, when combined with the tools from Section One, suggest a means for comprehensive case formulation, as well as managing a client's counselling journey.

Section Three includes Chapters 17 to 24. These describe six discrete groups of interventions or tasks for working with a client's emotional experiences. These methods include verbal, as well as experiential methods. Chapter 17 explores verbal techniques while Chapter 19 explores how verbal and talking methods can be enhanced to improved client experiences and expression of emotions. Chapter 18 describes visualising techniques, including ways to assist clients to observe their emotional experiences or to re-experience difficult events that have not been accessible and therefore remain unresolved. Chapter 20 outlines drawing activities that can assist clients in session to access both their secondary (defensive) and primary (authentic) emotional experiences. Chapter 21 demonstrates the adaptations of Eugene Gendlin's focusing work, including sensate and emotional focusing, for use with different problematic emotional experiences. Chapters 22, 23 and 24 explore the unique adaptations of two chair and empty chair work to a method known as multiple chair, which includes the use of cushions as props. These methods are used for the accessing of split-off aspects of self and emotional experiences, as well as for the resolution of unfinished business. These are comprehensive chapters showing the applications of interventions for both intra- and interpersonal issues.

This is a book that is packed with lots of practitioner goodies from page one to page 396. It is easy to read, and the type of text that can sit in a therapy room for reference. The wisdom in this book, while especially applicable to therapists working in the EFT modality or interested in the privileging of emotions, has many practical ideas and theoretical information useful for all. I would certainly recommend it as an essential read for all EFT practitioners and a very useful read for those front line practitioners looking for new edges in their work.

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