

Book Review for Susan Pollock, Thomas Pedulla and Ronald D. Siegel 'Sitting Together – Essential Skills for Mindfulness-Based Psychotherapy'

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Ann Moir-Bussy, *University of Sunshine Coast*

This book is a unique and excellent resource for any clinician of psychotherapy and counselling and for all counsellor educators who want to engage their students in becoming mindful therapists. There are now numerous books being written about the positive effects of practicing mindfulness. This particular book is indeed comprehensive in its approach as the authors are clinicians themselves and they bring their experience and wisdom to their teaching, providing many practical exercises and meditations to aid the reader in practice. Whether you are a newcomer just learning counselling or an expert with many years of practice behind you, the resources provided by the authors are numerous and engaging.

We cannot teach mindfulness without being a practitioner of mindfulness. The book commences with the chapter "Bringing mindfulness into psychotherapy" considering what it is and what it is not, the role of mindfulness both for the therapist and for the client, or, as the authors say, the "patient". Pollock, Pedulla and Siegal are clear in their exposition that there is no one practice that fits all and that there are times when meditation can be counterproductive if used as a defense mechanism rather than for healing. This introduction leads one into more in-depth exploration.

Becoming a mindful therapist is the focus of the next chapter. Here the authors introduce the reader to informal practice, formal practice and intensive practice with practical exercises for getting started and becoming mindfully aware even before entering the consulting room. The exercises are simple to follow and the variety put forward give options for the beginning therapist or trainee, to find what is the most suitable for them.

Developing the therapeutic relationship is, as we know, essential if counselling is to be effective. Cultivating mindfulness in this therapeutic relationship is the next step taken by the authors. How does one deepen the relationship? What distracts one from the relationship? How does one bring oneself back to the present moment and be there for the person? Again, practical exercises are elaborated on to enable this to happen.

Learning to distinguish what is happening within one's own body and emotions, as well as for the client, are important aspects of a mindful therapeutic relationship.

Chapters four to nine are rich in their development of ways to deepen concentration and mindfulness and filled with numerous clinical illustrations and vignettes encouraging cultivation of compassion both for oneself and for others. Practicing loving kindness and compassion to oneself is essential if one is to be able to help others do the same. Body scan meditations, mindful eating exercises, accepting and loving the difficult or unpleasant, letting go, and being present are all explained with reference to treating varied psychological disorders.

The book is a valuable and unique hands-on resource for everyday use in both personal life and clinical practice. The authors have made available free downloads which are narrated by the authors, along with accompanying handouts that can be given to the clients, on www.sittingtogether.com

I highly recommend this book to anyone who wishes to develop a mindfulness-based psychotherapy practice. We will certainly use it in teaching our Master of Counselling students.

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