

127 More Amazing Tips and Tools for the Therapeutic Toolbox: DBT, CBT and Beyond (2020) by Judith Belmont. PESI Publishing & Media. ISBN: 9781936128433

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Reviewed by: Philip Chittleborough

Book Review

As indicated by its title, this book provides (amongst other things) a large number and diverse range of tips related to the usage of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT), and interventions related to positive psychology. Most of the tips are presented in a three-part format of introductory remarks and/or theory relating to the tip; instructions or guidance on implementation of the tip; and finally, commentary, advice, or other remarks.

The author, Judith Belmont, broadly describes her intended audience as mental health professionals and therapists. The book will perhaps be particularly helpful for recent graduates and others seeking a resource that has a focus on practical application.

The author does not provide the reader with much information about herself in terms of her professional background, training, or experience. This might be a little off-putting to students and newly graduated therapists/counsellors who are accustomed to scrutinising the source of the works they read. However, it is clear that the author is equal to the task.

The book is organised around nine chapters, including a chapter each on CBT, DBT, positive psychology, healing and forgiveness, and improving communication skills and relationships. Other chapters cover life coaching, working with groups, using social media, and mental health tips that clients can readily access or carry with them.

Although the chapters are written primarily for therapists, they do also contain many worksheets that can be provided to clients. The reader is provided with a website where these worksheets can be downloaded by themselves. These are generous in number.

As for the content itself, I was a little unsure of the quality that I would find. This uncertainty was based on the book title's reference to "amazing" tips, and the chapter titles having a light and breezy tone with the relatively frequent use of exclamation marks. Again, this impression might be off-putting to therapists who look for signs of substance and rigour in their initial examination of a book. On the other hand, this first impression might appeal to other therapists.

Fortunately, however, I found this book to be better than my initial impressions. For the most part, the content is very sound. I had only minor quibbles with it, and these were infrequent. Its greatest strength is its application – which is the book’s primary aim (rather than going into a lot of depth in terms of theory). Worksheets are very much written in “client-friendly” terminology, and with an understanding of their perspective.

The chapter on CBT – which will probably be of great interest to many readers – is based on rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT), rather than “Beck-ian” CBT. In keeping with traditional REBT terminology, the author makes reference to “irrational” beliefs, even in client worksheets. The softer terminology used in Beck-ian CBT of “unhelpful” beliefs would have been better.

At times, the author is a little too optimistic in the messages conveyed in client worksheets – such as with statements like “Think straight to feel great!”. Also of concern is a text box referring to clients transforming their lives with “positive thoughts”. As well-trained CBT practitioners know, CBT is not necessarily about positive thoughts, but accurate and helpful thoughts.

Apart from these issues, the CBT chapter does an excellent job. It provides useful resources to provide to clients, such as helping clients to differentiate cognitions from emotions; identify different types of faulty thinking; and generate different cognitions and self-talk that better serve them. There is very useful material on helping clients separate facts from interpretations. The chapter ends by tackling the issue of worry, and includes a worksheet based on prominent authors in the area of generalised anxiety disorder (GAD).

The DBT chapter may also be of significant interest to readers. This draws on material from the originator of DBT – Marsha Linehan – as well as other respected authors, and does so quite effectively. As one of the longest chapters in the book, it covers a good deal across the four therapeutic areas of emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, mindfulness, and distress tolerance.

There is quite a strong emphasis on DBT acronyms for specific skills in each of these areas. In the case of mindfulness, there is perhaps too much reference to acronyms to give to clients, and not enough on equipping clients (or the therapist-reader) with the foundational principles. These principles are just as important as the actual practice of mindfulness itself.

With respect to interpersonal effectiveness in DBT, the author captures important key content, and refers the reader to a separate chapter devoted to communication and relationships. That chapter is useful in its own right, addressing personal rights, communication styles, and assertiveness in particular. Readers will find the resources in that chapter to be useful for many clients.

The chapter on positive psychology is somewhat basic, and a little light on content/substance at one or two points. Nonetheless, the chapter has some useful materials, and gives the topic of gratitude a justifiable amount of attention. A

differentiation between eudaimonic and hedonic happiness could have been a beneficial topic to include.

For those doing life-skills coaching, the associated chapter offers a useful range of miscellaneous tips. Some of these will be handy for mental health practitioners – such as those relating to operant conditioning principles, and those relating to reasons versus excuses for behaviour. The worksheets for clients in this chapter are thought-provoking.

The chapter on group activities seems to be pitched towards working with younger people. For readers who are involved in such work, this chapter offers quite a number of ideas that can highlight principles and facilitate learning in participants.

The author devotes the second-last chapter to the issue of how therapists can use social media appropriately, and is very practical. The last chapter contains ideas on how to help clients develop brief messages (principles, reminders, advice, etc) that will help them through their day. Clinicians may find it helpful to draw on these in working with clients.

In sum, the author does a very good job of constructing a large number of practical ideas and resources for working with clients. These resources span several major therapies/interventions and address a wide range of additional topics. Plentiful worksheets for clients are included. I would certainly use many of these in my own practice. The author writes these in the kind of language that clients will understand. For students, recent graduates, and experienced clinicians looking for new ideas, this book provides a wealth of materials that helps bridge the gap between theory and practice.

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