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BOOK REVIEWS

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy in Healthcare Settings: A Practical Guide. by Kidge Burns and Sarah Northcott

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The reader is taken systematically through the core principles and approaches of SFBT, which is useful for anyone new to SFBT, or those more seasoned practitioners to re-engage with its philosophical tenets. With a focus on recognising its merits in fostering worthwhile therapeutic interactions, especially with individuals experiencing life-changing conditions where there can be no simple solutions such as living with stroke, Parkinson's disease or motor neurone disease (MND) who may experience communication difficulties including expressive or receptive dysphasia.

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy in Healthcare Settings: A Practical Guide by Kidge Burns and Sarah Northcott

Routledge: Speechmark Books, 2023, 254 pages, ISBN: 9780367435097, £36.99 paperback ring bound (hardback and e-book versions available)

At the heart of healthcare education is the need to identify strategies to work co-productively with clients while emphasising the need to adopt person-centred approaches when creating therapeutic relationships. NHS England (2024) captured the value of adopting person-centred care using the collective voice of service users to emphasize its importance by stating, "*We hope to be valued for what and who we are, no matter how broken we may seem from the outside. We want to be offered the choice to maintain our independence, dignity and sense of self-worth. The challenge for the NHS and all health and care providers is to develop a mindset which will preserve our freedom to help ourselves in true partnership.*"

Practitioners should consider how to develop effective communication and interpersonal skills to help forge connections between practitioners and service users. This is emphasised within initiatives such as Making Every Contact Count (MECC) "*which is an approach to behaviour change that uses the millions of day-to-day interactions that organisations and individuals have with other people to support them in making positive changes to their physical and mental health and wellbeing.*" (Public Health England, 2016).

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A particular aspect of Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) is the way individuals can make ‘meaningful change’ in their lives towards recovery and beyond, along with its grassroots approach - being client-focused as well as incorporating positive psychology principles and practices. *Working with Solution-Focused Brief Therapy in Healthcare Settings* by Kidge Burns and Sarah Northcott uses an experiential approach to integrating SFBT within therapeutic interventions with service users who have a range of acute to severe and enduring health conditions across the lifespan.

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Alongside the practical advice and real-life examples where learning from the lived experience becomes crucial in appreciating the complexities of care, the book explores topics including, establishing person-centred, holistic goals for therapy, building on a person’s resources and successes, and responding to distress. There are several pages offering suggestions of questions or exercises to use with clients, and a link to photocopyable resources which can be downloaded for use in clinical practice settings.

Two aspects that stand out in this publication are the way the book walks practitioners through the case studies and emphasises time and again how to stay solution-focused, whilst adapting to meet the unique needs of individuals. These are the importance of using both verbal and non-verbal approaches with emphasis on using different sensory communication strategies such as visual and tactile engagement, and the importance acknowledging the distress of individuals.

The other aspect that stands out for me is how the authors present their collective knowledge, skills and experiences in developing such a practical resource. Kidge and Sarah both have backgrounds of working within clinical practice as speech and language therapists. Their work and experience complement each other well and have helped to build on the body of evidence-based practice available for practitioners today. Kidge is recognised in the field of SFBT, offering training with healthcare practitioners and being an accomplished solution-focused practitioner; her other works include *Focus on Solutions: A Health Professional’s Guide* (2nd ed., 2016). Sarah is a senior lecturer and clinical academic based at the Division of Language and Communication Science at City, University of London. Her research interests lie in exploring ways to support the emotional and social well-being of people living with stroke and aphasia. This has led to national

recognition receiving the Stroke Association Jack and Averil (Mansfield) Bradley Fellowship Award for stroke research, which enabled her to lead the Solution-Focused Brief Therapy in post-stroke aphasia (SOFIA) trial.

Having had the pleasure of reading this book, there is one final aspect which I would like to highlight; the importance of trauma-informed practice within healthcare. Although the book does not discuss this in any detail, the use of SFBT within healthcare recognises the important shift in focus from “*What’s wrong with you?*” to “*What happened to you?*” when working in all healthcare settings. The six key principles of trauma-informed practice as recognised by the UK Government’s working definition of trauma-informed practice (2022) identifies the importance of physical, psychological and emotional safety of all involved, the ability to build trust between staff, service users and the wider community in the openness and quality of services being provided. It recognises the importance of shared decision-making, choice and goal setting in determining the direction of recovery, and using a truly collaborative approach to overcome challenges and improve care. The importance of having a shared voice and level of power distribution at all levels to ensure everyone is empowered to take responsibility for their needs. The importance of being culturally competent and finding ways of delivering bespoke care with individual beliefs and values at the heart of the matter. Comparing these six key principles with the book’s overall approach it is clear to see how these connections embrace every one of them.

More about the book on the publisher’s website: <https://shorturl.at/8lJgM>

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