

in an easy, jargon-free style, and it is helped enormously by its structure. It is broken down into easily manageable sections whose relationship with other sections before and after makes sense. It also has commendably accurate and informative contents pages. It is advertised as practical and useful, general and specific: this promises a lot and I think it goes a long way to delivering.

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Risk Assessment: A Practitioner's Guide to Predicting Harmful Behaviour by Bryony Moore, Whiting & Birch, London, 1996. ISBN 1-871177-847 (Pbk), £12.95.

This book is aimed at practitioners working with clients at risk of exhibiting harmful behaviour. It offers guidelines to ensure child protection issues are addressed thoroughly and risks of potential abuse minimized.

The book successfully de-mystifies the risk assessment process, providing a format which ensures that a thorough and effective assessment of risk takes place and that those undertaking this task are in receipt of the underpinning knowledge that will enhance this process. It is written in an easy-to-read style, leaving the reader with the unmistakable impression that they have held dialogue with the author.

Guidelines are offered on the structure of report writing and suggestions for useful phraseology offered. Italicized script focuses attention on the key issues and all main points are reviewed at the end of each section. Case examples are displayed clearly from the main body of the text and the effective cross-referencing results in a 'user-friendly' style.

Section one puts into context the process of assessing the potential for harmful behaviour to occur, whether that be the risk of offending, abusive or self-destructive behaviour. This is done effectively by the presentation of facts relating to the responsibility of all professionals involved and the consequences of inadequate systems of assessment. This is followed by advice regarding the practical steps that can be taken to overcome many of the difficulties highlighted, leaving the reader with a feeling of optimism and a determination to enhance their existing skills.

Section two looks at the importance of acknowledging variables that exist between the assessor and the assessed and the barriers these may create. The necessity of addressing these issues, defining the target behaviour and identifying costs, controls and disinhibitors is stressed. The discussion of impulsivity and generability of the target behaviour ensures that the focus of the assessment remains on the ability of an individual to change.

Controversial questions are raised as to who is the most appropriate person to be undertaking such assessments, and open the debate of personal and professional investment in the assessments process. Such concerns have been present for some time but are often discussed as an aside to meetings, when the minute-taker is safely out of earshot.

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'Emotive subject of victim influences of the individual's behaviour'

Section three acknowledges the emotive, and therefore often avoided, subject of victim influences of the individual's behaviour, an issue which many workers lack the confidence to raise during the discussion of their cases. There follows a recognition of influences of motivation in relation to specific behaviours, the relapse prevention process, the use of distortions in the risk cycle and the role of significant others in this process. The author clearly demonstrates the influence these factors may have on future behaviour and how they pertain to the final recommendations of a thorough risk assessment.

Practical suggestions for how to overcome the difficulties of ensuring that the willingness and ability of significant others to report any lapses remain high despite the negative effects of previous discovery are assisted by good use of anecdotal and personal experiences which are both effective and insightful.

Section four of the book provides an overview of the issues raised in the preceding three sections, a brief summary of the main topics and recommendations for further reading. Reading this book, one is increasingly reminded of the feeling of child-like enlightenment reminiscent of when 'the penny drops' during the algebra lesson because a new teacher explained it in a different way. I suspect this book will become a well-leafed document in the briefcases of all professionals involved in the business of risk, the bible referred to by all those 'in the know'.

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