
Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

A comparison of two handbooks of family therapy techniques: Ten years later

Davis, K. (1996). *Families: A handbook of concepts and techniques for the helping professional*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.

Sherman, R. & Fredman, N. (1986). *Handbook of structured techniques in marriage and family therapy*. New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel.

Reviewed by: Ron Lehr, University of Northern British Columbia and Edward Epp, Terrace, BC.

Finally, I thought, a new handbook (that is, Davis, 1996) to aid the family practitioner in their day-to-day work with families! Unfortunately, and much to my dismay, my initial excitement quickly subsided. A first skimming of the book left me less than inspired. Definitions of terms like "roles," "rules" and "expectations" seem shallow and without obvious connection to theory. Not clearly explained is the use of the Evan's family as a motif for explication of concepts throughout the book. Genealogical constructions and family poems ("Dirty Socks," "Stewed Tomatoes," and "Security") seem to dangle arbitrarily. "The Connection Chart," eight pages of index items, is not well clarified by the author. After this clumsy introduction, the book abruptly launches into 90 pages of "Concepts." This alphabetical listing of therapeutic interventions begins with Accountability and goes into World View. Once again, there is no introduction to this material. Fitting on a single page, each concept is briefly developed headings of source, brief description, initial statement, and follow-up techniques.

Dutifully, I read each one of the 90 concepts in this handbook. The potential value of this listing took me a long time to recognize. A tight, condensed listing of these concepts brought together in one place may have some value as an index or bibliography. It may also serve a research function by placing both the publication and the author at the top of the page. For some, this information alone might make this handbook worth purchasing.

Davis follows the section on "Concepts," with a hundred pages, in alphabetical order, of "Techniques." Regretfully again, there is no introductory explanation. For the astute therapist, this would not be problematic but for the novice, a more thorough explanation would be more helpful. Criticism aside, the techniques themselves could be very useful for the therapist with a solid understanding of the underlying theory.

The final two sections of Davis' book outline a collection of approaches under the heading of "Guidelines" and "Worksheets." Only after reading these worksheets (on anger, caring days, etc.), did I recognize that these had been referred to throughout the text at the bottom of each page under the heading "follow-up." Linking these practical handsheets with a theory is a helpful tool.

Davis' book suffers from a weak and non-directed introduction and an absence of explanation about both its purpose and its use. However, after

working my way through it, I did recognize that this handbook could be helpful as a cursory index of several hundred theories and techniques. For a more complete understanding into the background and application of theory and practice one would have to go to other sources.

I believe one such source is Sherman and Fredman's handbook. Published more than 10 years ago, these authors explore more fully the rationale as well as the limitations of a family therapy handbook. Sherman and Fredman's book, organized into six broad headings based on current theoretical approaches, has more depth and inner logic than Davis' book. Each chapter focuses on various therapeutic approaches: psychodynamic, behavioural, strategic and alternative theoretical models. Psychodynamic theory, for example, guides the choice of technique in the first chapter, including dream work and guided visualizations. Rather than simply listing techniques, Sherman and Fredman provide explicit information on techniques and their use. A handbook of this sort provides a source of new and richer insights into techniques and expands a therapist's repertoire of resources.

Fredman and Sherman provide a much more complex and perhaps ultimately more useful handbook than Davis provides. One can actually learn from their technical presentations. There are more techniques listed in Davis' book, but the paucity of background material makes the application of the technique less probable without further research. As a touchstone, Davis' book might be referenced to stimulate a buried, forgotten thought or approach. There are, however, surprising benefits to Davis' abbreviated approach. The brevity allowed me to punctuate several current abstruse therapeutic concepts. For example, this handbook summarizes the application of O'Hanlon's "Formula Task" and Madanes' "Pretend" exercises. These strategic, constructivist approaches are broken down into just a couple of sentences. Like a well-written children's book, this simplified version sometimes makes a complex idea comprehensible.

Fredman and Sherman's handbook invites a long, delicious, contemplative read, in a comfortable chair under a soft reading light. Davis' book fits on a busy practitioner's bookshelf, occasionally called upon when the researcher, frustrated and perplexed with a therapeutic challenge, desperate for new ideas, scrambles for insights by random exploration into this encyclopedia of techniques.

Khalsa, SiriNam S. (1996). *Group Exercises for Enhancing Social Skills and Self-Esteem*. Sarasota, FL: Professional Resources Press. 131 pp. ISBN 1-56887-020-5.

Reviewed by: Chris Cooper, Stephenville, NF.

Group Exercises for Enhancing Social Skills and Self-Esteem is a collection of sixty activities designed to assist the professional counsellor in group work. According to the author, these exercises encourage the development of pro-social skills, leading to the enhancement of feelings of well-being and positive self-esteem. The introduction to the text offers an elementary in-