

---

Wright, L.M., Watson, W.L. & Bell, J.M. (1996). *Beliefs: The heart of healing in families and illness*. New York, NY: BasicBooks.

---

*Reviewed by:* Ron Lehr, Acadia University

Having personally experienced illness in my own family, supported friends who were ill, as well as having worked with families in this capacity, I was especially able to relate to the concepts of the book *Beliefs: The heart of healing in families and illness*. I believe the authors' knowledge and professional work in the Family Nursing Unit at the University of Calgary will significantly stimulate counsellors, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, physicians and others interested in how beliefs influence the lives of families experiencing illness.

This book, though necessarily academic at times, does a wonderful job of bridging the theoretical and the practical. In true narrative fashion, Part I starts with how the authors have come to understand and work collaboratively with families experiencing illness. Their personal accounts of their own experiences with, and beliefs around, illness segue seamlessly into a discussion of Maturana, Varela, communications theory, cybernetics, systems theory, and narrative therapy and how these contribute to the notion that core beliefs are central to an understanding of the biopsychosocial-spiritual perspective of working with families experiencing illness. The authors describe how to bring forth conversations of affirmation and affection as well as conversations of growth and change, and how this can lead to renewed beliefs about problems, persons, and relationships in families experiencing illness. The main theme of this section is summed up in the authors' words: "Beliefs shape our experience with illness far more than the disease itself." Part I concludes with a description of how the authors' views change and the implications this has for the therapeutic stance and guidance of clinicians. Using the constructivist view of the world as "objectivity-in-parentheses," the authors focus the reader on how clinicians can practically use facilitative therapeutic conversations. Though a dense chapter (from an objectivity-in-parentheses perspective!), the authors excellently describe the beliefs that serve as guiding principles for therapeutic change.

Part II of this book describes what the authors call the "macromoves" of their counselling approach. These include preparing and maintaining the ground, distinguishing the problem, and removing obstacles to change. Obstacles may include anything from a dissatisfied, angry family member to conflictual involvement of multiple health care professionals.

The authors then proceed to a practical "how to" section where they articulate therapeutic "moves," on-going processes and the "micromoves" within the macromove. The authors draw upon their own collection of experiences, as well as those from the family therapy literature, to describe in detail the micromoves that best characterize their work. This section of the book derives its strength from the authors' abilities to frame the "moves" in a facilitative process that is congruent with their theoretical/therapeutic stance.

This second section of the book concludes with details on how to distinguish change during the therapeutic process. The authors' opening line in the final chapter of Part II is "Change needs to be distinguished to become a reality." From here, the authors expand on a step-by-step explanation of how to effectively distinguish change through "passionate persistence by the clinician"!

Part III brings the book full circle with a detailed session-by-session account of one of the authors' own research families — an excellent way to draw the narrative thread to a close. The three authors of *Beliefs* are to be commended for the incredible work they put into making this a thought provoking and personally reflective book for practitioners working with families facing the physical and emotional impact of illness.