

Book Review / Compte rendu

Hershler, A., Hughes, L., Nguyen, P., & Wall, S. (Eds.). (2021). *Looking at trauma: A tool kit for clinicians*. Pennsylvania State University Press. ISBN: 978-0-271-09207-2, xviii + 77 pp.

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ABSTRACT

This book review looks at a clinical tool kit that provides a solid conceptual foundation in trauma care. The editors have drawn on the expertise of psychotherapists, psychological associates, psychiatrists, social workers, and a medical illustrator. The unique approach offers a resource to paraprofessionals, professionals, and anyone working in settings where trauma is a necessary consideration. The tool kit provides practice information for psychoeducation and guidance on how to develop strategies to manage the effects of complex trauma. The primary goal is to build community capacity in an already overburdened mental health system.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce compte rendu de livre examine une boîte à outils cliniques qui fournit des bases conceptuelles dans le traitement des traumatismes. Les rédactrices s'appuient sur les compétences de psychothérapeutes, d'associés en psychologie, de psychiatres, de travailleurs sociaux, et d'un illustrateur médical. L'approche particulière offre une ressource aux paraprofessionnels, aux professionnels, et à quiconque travaille dans des cadres où il est nécessaire de prendre en compte les traumatismes. La boîte à outils fournit des renseignements sur les pratiques de la psychoéducation et des conseils pour élaborer des stratégies de gestion des effets de traumatismes complexes. Le principal objectif est de renforcer la capacité communautaire dans un système de santé mentale déjà surchargé.

Hershler, Hughes, Nguyen, and Wall have drawn on the expertise of psychotherapists, psychological associates, psychiatrists, social workers, and a medical illustrator from the Toronto area to create an interactive resource to support work with adults and youth who have experienced trauma. A short biography is

provided at the end of the book for each contributor. The authors use a unique comic-style interactive presentation to help clients understand how trauma affects the body, the brain, and the spirit and to help them develop skills to manage the manifestation of trauma in their lives. The book begins with a land acknowledgement and positions the authors as settlers in Treaty 13 land. Hershler and Hughes situate themselves further and identify the need for members of a helping profession to educate themselves about the history of the lands they inhabit, presumably with the goal of providing trauma-informed care from an intergenerational perspective. They then describe graphic medicine, the comic genre utilized in this resource, and the advantages of this medium in client care. They suggest that using comics provides a less threatening entry point to the topic of trauma. The illustrator provides a comprehensive description of her collaboration with clinicians and her process of creating her comics, from conceptualization to development completion.

Refreshingly, Chapter 1 is dedicated to caring for the caregiver; this supports the author's message that we can support our clients only if we take care of ourselves first. The chapters that follow begin by providing background information on the topic, defining key terms, and describing how to use the model being presented. Each chapter also includes "educational gems" that take the form of lessons learned from the clinical experiences of the authors and concludes with the graphic presentation of the material directed at the client. The clinical focus of these chapters includes self-care and grounding, understanding complex PTSD, window of tolerance, triggers, the impact of trauma on the brain and memory, and structural dissociation. Chapters draw on a number of established theories, such as Siegel's window of tolerance, Fay's parallel lives, and MacLean's triune brain. Information is provided to help clients develop an individual picture of how their experience of trauma has affected them and to cultivate strategies for grounding and establishing safety. The final chapters focus on developing skills to help clients establish or re-establish supportive, healthy relationships.

In each chapter, the descriptive content for clinicians is concise and easy to read, including just enough information to guide a session with a client. Each chapter includes references for clinicians to follow up on for more information. The presentation makes the book accessible to paraprofessionals from diverse backgrounds working in diverse settings. The client sections in each chapter use traditional comic-style squares and thought bubbles with other visuals that make the relevant information easy to move through; this delivers the complex, emotion-laden information to clients in accessible chunks. The strength in these chapters is the flexibility in how clients can conceptualize the theory and apply it to their experiences and current functioning. At different points, clients are asked to circle, draw, or write relevant information to help them transfer the knowledge to their experiences. The drawings are simple and clear, and the illustrator effectively organizes the material so it flows in a logical sequence to help clients

build on previous information. For example, in a chapter explaining how trauma impacts memory, the illustrator describes how explicit and implicit memory is encoded and then, using the image of a road with a large rock, shows how memory is altered by experience. The chapter ends by suggesting strategies to work with intrusions and finally asks clients to identify their own strategies. The client sections are meant to be worked through together with a clinician, presumably with the comics available for clients to take home and refer to between sessions. The section at the beginning of the chapter provides step-by-step guidance on how clinicians can lead clients through the material.

The tool kit is aptly named and provides solid information and strategies to guide psychoeducation and to help establish skills in managing the impact of trauma. The authors accomplish their goal of offering this tool kit as a way to build community capacity, thus situating the resource as a useful guide for paraprofessionals. The tool kit could be offered to frontline workers who provide the majority of services to youth affected by trauma in an overburdened mental health care system. For example, residential care facilities or group homes could benefit from the information and the strategies in the book, with the caveat that no trauma-focused service should be provided without the guidance of a trained professional with established competency in the area. This resource could also be useful in counselling education programs, given that it covers a wide range of topics associated with trauma. In short, it provides valuable information in a clear, logical format. Not all clients will be amenable to the comic format, and clinicians will have to determine which clients will benefit from this method of psychoeducation. But given its cover price and its accessible nature, this book is a good resource to have on the office shelf.

About the Author

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