

January 1992

Learning Cognitive Therapy

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Recommended Citation

Allen, M.D., Ph.D., A.J. (1992) "Learning Cognitive Therapy," *Jefferson Journal of Psychiatry*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 1 , Article 13.Available at: <http://jdc.jefferson.edu/jeffjpsychiatry/vol10/iss1/13>

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Learning Cognitive Therapy

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO COGNITIVE THERAPY

Dean Schuyler, M.D.

W.W. Norton, 1991

\$22.95

153 pages

A.J. Allen, M.D., Ph.D.

Normally, general psychiatry residents in my program receive training in cognitive therapy during their third year of residency. I started my child psychiatry residency before I did my third year of general residency, but I wanted to know something about cognitive therapy because I felt it might be helpful to me in my work with parents. I had started on several of Aaron Beck's books, but had always found them a bit weighty and was easily interrupted before I completed them. I wanted more of a general introduction to cognitive therapy, something short (so I would finish it), yet also practical. *A Practical Guide to Cognitive Therapy* by Dean Schuyler neatly filled my needs.

This book is based upon Dr. Schuyler's workshops at the APA Annual Meeting. It is composed of 15 chapters, which are subdivided into 5 parts. Because the book is only 153 pages long, many of the chapters are easily read in 10 to 15 minutes of spare time (the longest is 20 pages, the shortest 5). Not only that, but the writing is generally clear and to the point, with many clinical examples and practical suggestions. I found that I actually pushed myself through the book rather quickly as a result—I did not want to put it down.

The first two chapters of the book deal with "Preliminary Issues," such as what it is that psychotherapy really does for patients. There is also a very brief introduction to cognitive therapy and training in it. Part II, "The Cognitive Model," is the real meat of the book. Chapter 3 is a "prelude" to the model, and includes a more detailed overview of brief therapies in general, and cognitive therapy in particular. Chapter 4 begins with a request for readers to temporarily lay aside their assumptions and preconceptions about psychotherapy, then discusses the "basics" of the cognitive model. I found this chapter especially well done, and I have reviewed parts of it several times since first reading it. Chapter 5, the longest chapter in the book, deals with practical techniques of cognitive therapy. It is another gem, full of useful ideas.

Parts III and IV discuss several general areas in which cognitive therapy may be beneficial. Chapter 6 deals with people in love and out of love, and chapter 7 with individuals who are separated or divorced. While these are problems many of us think of as being amenable to cognitive therapy, chapter 8 focuses on work with older people—a group many view as rigid and unlikely to change, and thus as poor

candidates for psychotherapy. Chapter 9 deals with another difficult group of patients, those with personality problems, and describes a long-term version of cognitive therapy. Chapter 10 deals with reshaping parent-child relationships, and chapter 11 focuses on cognitive therapy with couples. Chapter 12 completes the methodological portion of the book by exploring rationale and methods for following up on former cognitive therapy patients. Part V consists of three chapters, each of which illustrates the use of cognitive therapy with a different patient. This case material, as well as that found throughout the book, was very interesting and helped to bring alive the concepts discussed elsewhere in the text.

To assess the quality of the information Dr. Schuyler presents, I loaned the book to a colleague who had gone through the cognitive therapy training segment in our general psychiatry program. He read about 3 chapters in one sitting, and informed me that it closely paralleled the organization and content of the lectures he had heard. He also agreed the book was quite readable, and felt it was a good introduction to the method.

I would strongly recommend this book to anyone desiring a practical introduction to cognitive therapy—especially if time for reading is at a premium. Its organization also makes it an excellent reference for quickly refreshing your knowledge of cognitive methods. The main disadvantage of this book is its list price, \$22.95 in the U.S., which seems a bit steep for a 150 page manual.