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Review of Healing in Action: Adventure-based counseling with therapy groups

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Healing In Action: Adventure-Based Counseling with Therapy Groups is a highly practical, theoretically-based book for therapists working with groups. The book briefly reviews the development of Adventure-Based Counseling (ABC), described as “physically active play therapy for people of all ages” (p. xiii). Chapter Two provides a rationale for using ABC with survivors of trauma, citing the therapeutic use of movement, semipermeable boundaries, kinesthetic awareness, focusing on the present moment, touch, and perceived risk. Chapter Three rounds out Part I of the book by discussing a hodgepodge of topics, including the therapeutic value of play, insurance issues, materials and supplies, and the potential role changes involved for therapists using ABC.

Part II (pages 33-141) comprises the heart of this book. The twelve chapters are organized around a specific theme or type of material used, and the multiple activities included in each chapter are sequenced to be used in one session, if desired.

The final part of the book delves more deeply into using ABC to treat addictions, with Chapter 18 providing the blueprint for an entire “Recovery Adventure Day” (pages 149-192) designed to be used in typical treatment centers and 12-Step groups.

The strengths of *Healing in Action* far outweigh the limitations, and groupwork practitioners, instructors, and students will find a wealth of practical therapeutic group activities that they can immediately apply to a myriad of situations. The author thoughtfully sequences sessions based on theoretical concepts from group theory and adult learning theory, with a clear rationale for each activity. For instance, each session begins with a “question of the day” to warm group members up to each other and the theme(s) of the day. Sessions then move into

activities that are interactive and fun while also guiding participants to explore their own reactions and tendencies in the moment. Finally, the leader is given suggestions for facilitating a deeper dive into the themes and their applicability to the lives of participants.

The way in which activities are presented is particularly helpful to practitioners. Each activity includes detailed instructions, materials needed, approximate time, description, and processing points. The processing points are designed to move the group from thinking metaphorically about the activity they have just completed to thinking about how the relevant themes apply in their daily lives. The processing points provided by the author are like a strand of gold running through the book, tying the therapeutic experiences and themes of an activity together for the group members. For example, after an activity in which group members take risks and try something new, suggested processing points include: “What was it like to try something new? Was this anxiety-provoking for some people? Where else do new situations create anxiety? Think of the first day at a new job or starting a new training program or class” (P. 84). After another activity, a suggested question is “What does it feel like to have to live with the consequences of other people’s choices?” (p. 85). Processing points provide group leaders/facilitators with guidance in addressing a variety of topics including boundaries, limited resources, frustration, anxiety, being present in the moment, feelings, goals, planning, waiting, communication, roles, taking risks, challenges, relationships, conflict, and more. In addition, the author discusses potential trouble spots in activities and examples of how to handle them.

A few other strengths of *Healing in Action* are worth mentioning. First, the author presents numerous exercises that do not require any material whatsoever, and of activities that do require materials, most are easily obtained. The author even provides information on how to obtain all materials needed for activities in the book in one bundle. Second, most of the activities

presented in the book can be done outdoors as well as indoors. Third, most activities can be used across age ranges, treatment foci, and agency type. For example, while the book uses many examples from the addiction treatment field, as this is the specialty of the author, the activities could easily be used in school social work, eating disorder treatment groups, and many other inpatient and outpatient therapy groups.

The historical and theoretical bases for ABC are presented in Chapters One, Two, and Seventeen. These chapters are beneficial in giving both academics and practitioners a context for the practice of ABC. The author links ABC to various theoretical traditions including group theory and the stages of group development, attachment theory, trauma theory, and theories behind play therapy and Adventure Therapy. This provides readers with a rich mix of ideas in which to conceptualize ABC. However, as the author duly notes, the evidence-based foundation for ABC specifically is sparse. Occasionally, the justification made for ABC based on other findings is tenuous. For example, the author extends some of the theory and findings related to Adventure Therapy to ABC (pages 144-145). In addition, the author argues for how ABC can be helpful for survivors of trauma. While these things may very well be true, they have not yet been backed up by research.

On the other hand, the author's integration of ABC's history and conceptual foundation with theory and research in related areas shines a light on opportunities for further research and theory development. Since the anecdotal evidence for the helpfulness of ABC for group therapy participants is strong, practitioners and scholars can use the brief theoretical sections in this book as the springboard for further examination of ABC's efficacy.

The book does have some minor limitations. There are a few word-based activities that would not work well if the group consisted of people with limited English or a variety of

language backgrounds (for example “Scrabble” p. 72-73 and “Word Circles” p. 70). Some activities work only for those who are physically agile, such as “Paper Drop” (p. 76) and “Moon Ball” (p. 61). Finally, while the author alludes to cultural issues, practitioners will need to be attuned to their groups’ compositions and cultural backgrounds when choosing activities. For some cultural or ethnic groups, certain activities would not be acceptable for a variety of reasons, including gender norms.

Overall, this is an outstanding book that supplies instantly available, thoughtfully constructed Adventure-Based Counseling interventions for a range of populations and groups. Instructions are clearly and concisely written, with therapeutic rationale and processing points thoroughly integrated into each activity description. The history and theory sections of the book are brief but do serve to ground practitioners and academics in basic concepts of ABC. *Healing in Action* will likely become a must-have book for group work practitioners as well as for those outside of group therapy practice. The activities presented could be used in corporate team-building settings, youth groups, informal support groups, and various other places. Finally, this book will spark creativity in the development of further Adventure-Based Counseling activities to use with therapy groups, thereby enriching groupwork practice.

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