

A Brief Guide to Brief Therapy

Brian Cade & William Hudson O'Hanlon

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Therapy books seem to fall into one of three categories. There are those that are concerned with the underlying philosophy of an approach; those that detail the structures which proceed from that philosophy; and those that describe the 'hands-on' techniques based on particular structures. The latter category are usually the most popular with practising therapists who can make instant use of what has been learned. However it is easy to forget that an occasional foray into theory can lead to a more fundamental change of approach and a fresh look at 'how we do what we do'. This book, as befits a 'brief' guide, is very much an overview, with the emphasis on philosophy and structures.

The book begins with a look at the origins of Brief Therapy, and its underpinning assumptions. The authors define the two main strands within what is called Brief Therapy: the System oriented (which focuses on family or social group interactions) and the Process oriented (which is concerned with the individuals own learned behavioural patterns). Cade and O'Hanlon concentrate on the latter, but demonstrate that this approach does not exclude working with families or groups.

The main difference between the Brief Therapy approach and most others, is in it's emphasis on the **present and future** of a problem, rather than the more usual focus on causal elements in the past. Problems are seen as 'repetitive patterns' or 'feedback loops' in which the subject reinforces an associative pattern every time they perform a particular sequence of behaviour, thought, and affect. Where these patterns originate is seen as of less interest than how they can be stopped from self-regeneration. The authors go so far as to assert that the complexity of each individual's developmental experience may preclude conclusive determination of all causal factors.

The book then goes on to give an outline of the components of Brief Therapy in the sequence in which they become relevant. Thus the reader journeys through: negotiation or definition of a problem; ethical issues of power and manipulation; the 'ineffective solution' feedback loop; resource finding; and a selection of structural techniques including reframing, future focussing, pattern breaking, analogy/metaphor and paradoxical

intervention.

The book concludes with the reprint of a fascinating paper by Brian Cade on the phenomena of over/under-responsibility. This is the often-observed condition whereby a formative experience of being 'overcared for' can lead to guilt and a repetitive compensatory pattern (eg. over-caring for others, neglecting own interests, 'martyr' complex). This last section demonstrates very well, how the Brief Therapy structure can explain and suggest solutions to a defined problem.

Throughout the book Cade and O'Hanlon answer many of the criticisms that have been levelled at Brief Therapy from the outset. One of the most common of these is that Brief Therapy, in it's preference for observable phenomena ignores the role of the client's feeling state. This style of therapy does question the advisability of cathartic, or abreactional expressions of emotion. The authors point out that repeating a powerful emotive experience is also a reinforcing process, especially when 'labelled' in a way that perpetuates a sense of dis-empowerment (eg. victim). Cade and O'Hanlon, acknowledge the profound effect that feelings have on our lives, but ask us to consider how much of what we believe to be discrete 'emotions' are, in fact, our mental interpretations of physiological states. How do we know that our internal experience of 'fear' is not the same physiological state as 'exhilaration'

experienced through a different filter? And might not 'changing the filter' change our subjective experience, reframe our feelings about our feelings?

Cade and O'Hanlon's writing style is clear, lively and entertaining without ever losing sight of the objective. Your reviewer was particularly taken with the idea of inviting Paul Watzlawick, one of Brief Therapy's progenitors, to debate the existence of a reality outside of our interpretations of it, in front of an irate polar bear. For anyone new to Brief Therapy, this book, is an excellent introduction to the subject. For those with some knowledge of Erickson's work or NLP, many of the concepts and techniques will seem familiar, if couched in somewhat different language. For anyone concerned with practical answers to practical problems, 'A Brief Guide To Brief Therapy' is a refreshingly thought-provoking

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Solution-Orientated Hypnosis - An Ericksonian Approach

William Hudson O'Hanlon and Michael Martin

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Solution-Orientated Hypnosis follows a style apparently popular in the Ericksonian/NLP fields; the transcribed workshop format. To be frank I had some doubts about this sort of book. They were, I felt, poor substitutes for attending workshops in person.

Astute Ericksonians will note the "but" implied in the last sentence. And here is it. But after reading this book I found myself employing some of its techniques in my own work.

This occurred spontaneously, unconsciously and achieved noticeable results. So what was happening here? Hypnotised by a book? Yes, I think so. I responded to the suggestions within, and thus learned effectively, unconsciously, how to use the techniques.

The book was transcribed by Michael Martin from tape recordings of a workshop conducted by Bill O'Hanlon in 1989 and has been thoughtfully done, resulting in a well organised, clear and helpful text.

For instance, it includes handouts used in the workshop, in addition to a comprehensive index, a bibliography and a list of resources for follow up use, such as video and audio cassettes. Thus, as well as being an entertaining and informative read, it also serves as a useful work of reference.

The contents list reflects the careful way the book/workshop is laid out, starting from the assumption the audience/reader knows nothing about hypnosis and suggests that by the end of the process – a two-day workshop – they will be able to induce hypnosis.

O'Hanlon of course doesn't say that they must do so. For to paraphrase the title of the last chapter, O'Hanlon is – *only a hypnotist . . . so this is only a suggestion.*

One area where I do take issue with O'Hanlon is over his claims about voluntary and involuntary behaviour. The author has, I realise, reframed his ideas about what constitutes a voluntary or involuntary complaint, but to describe smoking as a voluntary act is a little misleading.

O'Hanlon says that if you ask clients to show you how they "do" the complaint and they can do so, eg., they can light a cigarette and smoke it, then that is a voluntary complaint.

That though begs a very important question. What about withdrawal symptoms? As a former heavy smoker I can attest to their existence. Anyone can stop smoking. If a person smokes twenty cigarettes they stop smoking twenty times. But what is the real complaint here? Surely it is the withdrawal feelings that demand a further cigarette.

Ask clients if they can "do" withdrawal for you. They won't be able to. Withdrawal is involuntary in nature, according to O'Hanlon's own criteria.

O'Hanlon is right in smoking is difficult to deal with using hypnosis. But the reason is that smoking is a very serious, addictive complaint, which is usually regarded as a fairly trivial little habit. This trivialisation is aided by characterising it as a "voluntary complaint".

It is noticeable how the book employs that special use of language and the neologism so beloved by the Ericksonians.

For instance, there is a handout title which includes the work "*tranceports*". Or then there is the first chapter of the book is entitled "*introinduction*".

They just can't leave it alone, these Ericksonians! They even use their books to induce trance. They are what O'Hanlon calls "trance junkies".

But I'm not complaining. My professional competence has been enhanced by O'Hanlon and Martin's "Solution-Oriented Hypnosis" and though there were possibly other matters with which I could take issue, one cannot expect to agree with everything in such

books.

Other than the above discord, most of the text present no problems. This was because either I had seen the material before and was already comfortable with it – or because it was new, and felt intuitively correct.

Personally I am interested in Erickson's work as an addendum to my own, not a replacement. It was pleasing therefore to note that O'Hanlon allowed some balance in his book, in that he described criticism of the Ericksonian movement by his colleague Joe Barber who mistrusted the tendency to regard Erickson as some sort of guru figure.

Meanwhile, if your interests are also moving towards this sort of work, then this is definitely a book to read.

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