

February 2009
New Bibliotherapy scheme

Bibliotherapy: The power of words



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The Power of Words

What is bibliotherapy?

The use of books for therapeutic purposes is known as 'bibliotherapy'. Self-help books have been used in this way for many years and are now being prescribed as a means of providing psychological therapy for people experiencing emotional and psychological difficulties.

The effectiveness of bibliotherapy has been well established in clinical trials. This has been recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) UK as a useful start in treating mild and moderate depression, anxiety and panic and some other mental health problems.

In a position paper on mental health and primary care in the UK, the Royal College of General Practitioners said: "Personal choice and autonomy are critical in maintaining mental health. Often people want to help themselves, approaching the family and peer group before coming into contact with primary care. When asked, people repeatedly say that they want to learn how to manage their own problems for themselves as well as draw upon resources in the community."

Launch of scheme

In February 2009, the Library Council of Ireland, the HSE and the Irish College of General Practitioners are introducing the 'Power of Words' scheme to support and aid people with emotional and psychological difficulties to gain insight into and treat the problems that are upsetting or disturbing them.

In March 2007, the North Inner City Partnership in Primary Care (Dublin), in collaboration with Dublin City Public Libraries, piloted the first book prescription scheme in Ireland, led by the first author, Elaine Martin, HSE senior psychologist. The objective of the North Inner City Book Prescription Scheme is to give GPs, mental health professionals and their patients choice in the treatment approach to some mild and moderate mental health difficulties. The scheme provides GPs and other professionals with a list of high-quality self-help books. Practitioners may in turn bring these books to the attention of the patients and clients who are likely to benefit from their use. The books are stocked by local libraries and therefore readily accessible. The appetite for a self-help approach seems to be great with over 2500 books issued from six inner city libraries in the first year of the scheme.

Many thousands of self-help books exist and while the best of these are highly effective, others are not so useful. In preparation for this book scheme, a list of high-quality self-help books has been compiled, based on recommendations of psychologists, counsellors and psychotherapists working in Ireland. Most of the books included in the scheme are written by leading psychologists and many present self-help versions of established treatment programmes. This list will now be available to all GPs and the books will be stocked in Public Libraries and in many good bookshops.

Libraries will also have some audio CDs on a selection of the self-help subjects. Library staff can help and support users of this scheme and have undertaken extra training to support this initiative.



Book based therapy will not be suitable for everyone, but it is certainly appropriate for a proportion of those who consult their GP or other healthcare professionals with a psychological problem. For those who are able to make use of Bibliotherapy, the books highlight a problem-solving approach to recovery and emphasise the potential of self-management. The person becomes knowledgeable about their difficulty and is encouraged to engage in self-monitoring, self-assessment and guided self-treatment. The emphasis is on the individual's active involvement and empowerment in recovery instead of or in conjunction with medication to deal with the problem.

A selection of books recommended for adults

The scheme includes books on many of the common psychological problems that people experience including depression, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive problems, social phobia, relationship and sexual problems, panic, anger, stress, parenting, low self-esteem, and the aftermath of sexual abuse.

A selection of books recommended for the child and family

The scheme includes books on many of the common psychological problems that families can experience, such as behavioural problems, anger, bullying, bereavement, confidence and self-esteem development, divorce, potty training, sadness, sibling rivalry, sleep, step families, teenagers, worries and fears.


Who might benefit?

The ideal person most likely to benefit from this scheme would have a good level of literacy, be highly motivated to work independently on tackling his or her problem, and be familiar with the process of following a structured 'recipe' in a book (as in a cookbook or DIY book).

How does the scheme work?

There are a core of 30 books that have been carefully selected and are evidence-based recommended to each library service through the Library Council of Ireland, which should be available in your local library service.

If you are of the opinion that the patient would benefit from reading one of the listed books, you write out the name and ask the patient to read it, and if the presenting problem remain, they can make an appointment to revisit you.

It is also recommended to the libraries to have audio versions available if possible. 

Recommended Books

Problem/issue	Easy	Book title	Author(s)	Year	Publisher
Anger		Overcoming anger and irritability	Will Davies	2000	Constable & Robinson
Anxiety		Overcoming anxiety	Helen Kennerly	2004	Constable & Robinson
	Yes	How to stop worrying	Frank Tallis	1990	Sheldon Press
		Overcoming social anxiety and shyness	Gillian Butler	2003	Constable & Robinson
Bereavement		The courage to grieve	Judy Tatelbaum	1980	HarperPerennial
Child sexual abuse (Adult survivors)		Breaking free: Help for survivors of child sexual abuse	Carolyn Ainscough & Kay Toon	2000	Sheldon Press
Depression	Yes	Depression: The common sense approach	Bates, Tony	1999	Newleaf
Post-natal depression		Coping with post-natal depression: Light at the end of the tunnel	Mary Pigot	1996	Columba Press
Depression/anxiety/self-esteem		The feeling good handbook	Burns, David	1999	Plume Books
Obsessions and compulsions		Overcoming obsessive compulsive disorder	David Veale and Rob Willson	2005	Constable & Robinson
Panic		When panic attacks	Tubridy, Aine	2003	Newleaf
Practical psychotherapy		Change for the better: Self-help through practical psychotherapy	Elizabeth Wilde McCormick	2002	Continuum
Self-esteem		Overcoming low self-esteem	Fennell, Melanie	2004	Constable & Robinson
Stress		The relaxation and stress reduction workbook (5th Ed)	Martha Davis, Elisabeth Robbins Eshelman and Matthew McKay	2000	New Harbinger
Traumatic stress		Overcoming traumatic stress	Herbert, Claudia & Wetmore, Ann	2002	Constable & Robinson
Child and family list					
Parenting	Yes	Parent power – bringing up responsible children and teenagers	John Sharry	2002	John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
		How to talk so kids will listen & listen so kids will talk	Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish	1999	Collins Living
	Yes	STEP: Parenting young children (0-5 yrs.)	Donald Dinkmeyer, Gary D McKay et al	1997	Used to be AGS (American Guidance Service, Inc.), now Dinkmeyer
	Yes	STEP: Parent handbook (6-12 yrs.)	D. Dinkmeyer, G.D. McKay et al	1997	AGS
	Yes	STEP: Parenting teenagers	D. Dinkmeyer, G.D. McKay et al	1998	AGS
		The incredible years – A troubleshooting guide for parents of children aged 2-8 years	Carolyn Webster-Stratton	2006	
	CDs	The incredible years parent and child series (audio CDs)	Carolyn Webster-Stratton		
		How to get your kid to eat... but not too much	Ellyn Satter	1987	Bull Publishing
Separation and divorce	Yes	When parents separate: Helping your children cope	John Sharry, Peter Reid and Eugene Donohoe	2001	Veritas
		Dinosaurs divorce: A guide for changing families (For young children)	Laurene Krasny Brown and Marc Brown	2008	
Bereavement		Finding a way through when someone close has died (For children and teens)	Pat Mood and Lesley Whittaker	2001	Jessica Kingsley Publishers
Bereavement by suicide		Beyond the rough rock: Supporting a child who has been bereaved by suicide (Child-friendly)	Diana Crossley & Julie Stokes		
Depression		Coping with depression in young people: A guide for parents	Carol Fitzpatrick & John Sharry	2004	Wiley & Sons
Bullying		Bullying: A parent's guide	Jennifer Thomson		Forward Press
		How to handle bullies, teasers and other meanies (For children)	Kate Cohen-Posie	1995	Rainbow Books

The list above is the final list of 30 core books that will be recommended for placement in all libraries in Ireland. This list can be added to by local services to meet the needs of the patients in any particular area.

Useful websites

Adult Mental Health

www.aware.ie

www.grow.ie

www.bodywhys.ie

www.sirl.ie

www.drugsinfo.ie

www.samaritans.org

www.alzheimer.ie

www.headwayireland.ie

www.mentalhealthireland.ie

www.yourmentalhealth.ie

www.irishadvocacynetwork.com

www.rcpsych.ac.uk

www.mind.org.uk

www.ias.ie

www.mhcirl.ie

Children & Families

www.barnardos.ie

www.childrensrights.ie

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

www.endchildpoverty.ie

www.ispcc.ie

www.irishhealth.com

www.youth.ie

Other

www.carersireland.com

www.fedvol.ie

www.hse-ncs.ie

HSE Information Line

1850 24 1850