

Books can help

Many people develop emotional or psychological problems at some time during their life.

At any one time, about 10% of adults are feeling depressed. Others feel anxious about leaving the house, meeting people, or have worries that just seem to go on and on.

Some experience panic attacks that can be very frightening and unpredictable, while others realise that their tidiness around the house is becoming an obsession.

Some people are highly stressed by work or family life, while others are haunted by abuse that happened in childhood and many people just don't feel good about themselves. Their self-esteem is low, they lack confidence and feel useless and unlovable.

Many people consult their doctor for help with their emotional problems, and they can help in several ways.

They might refer the person to a primary care mental health worker, or to a specialist mental health service where psychologists, psychiatrists and others are able to provide treatment. However, the availability of these specialist resources is limited.

More often, the doctor will offer advice, prescribe medication to relieve such symptoms as anxiety or depression, or recommend contact with a local voluntary organisation.

Medication has an important role in helping people with emotional problems, and is often very effective.

However, reading appropriate 'self help' material can also help people. Many self-help books have been shown to be very useful in helping people to overcome a range of psychological problems. The use of books as a means of providing psychological therapy is known as 'bibliotherapy'.

Books on Prescription

Books on Prescription is a book prescription scheme that allows selected self-help books to be prescribed by doctors and other primary care mental health workers.

Once issued, the prescription can be exchanged for the book at the local branch library. The prescriber will advise on the local libraries that are taking part in the scheme.

Many thousands of self-help books are available and Psychologists and counsellors were surveyed to discover which self-help books they would personally recommend. A list of highly recommended books was then compiled and stocks of all of these books were placed in local libraries.

How the scheme works

Doctors have been sent the list of the self-help books recommended by specialists and invited to issue an appropriate 'Book Prescription' to patients in their care. The prescription specifies the length of time for which the book can be borrowed. This will normally be 3 weeks for books and 1 week for CD's. The patient can extend the

borrowing time, if necessary, by requesting a renewal from the library.

Many of the most effective books present self-help versions of the kind of therapy that would be given by a psychologist or a counsellor.

In many cases they present complete step-by-step treatment programmes with exercises, self-assessments, diary sheets, etc to be completed by the reader.

If you use a prescribed library book you should make your own copy of the exercises and not write on the book.

The scheme includes books on many psychological problems that people experience, including depression, social phobia, panic, stress and low self-esteem.

Some people might wish to buy the prescribed book for themselves, and all of the books on the list are currently in print. Many are normally in stock in leading bookstores. Any books that are not in stock will be available to order.

The book prescription scheme offers an additional source of help for people experiencing emotional problems. A self-help book can be used in addition to any medication that has been prescribed, or while the patient is waiting to see a counsellor or mental health specialist.

This approach may not be suitable for everyone, and may not always be effective, but there is now good evidence to show that books can often help.

Books on Prescription


- There is good evidence that the best self-help books can be highly effective in helping people with emotional problems.
- The use of self-help books is known as 'bibliotherapy'
- The Books on Prescription allows primary care mental health workers, doctors and others to prescribe high quality self-help books from a list of books recommended by leading psychologists and counsellors.
- Many therapists regularly recommend particular books to their clients or patients and soon get to know which of these books are most useful.
- Self-help books can be highly effective when used as a main source of help, or in addition to prescribed medication or counselling.
- Most of the books included in the scheme are written by leading psychologists and many present self-help versions of established treatment programmes.
- Problems addressed by the books on the list include depression, panic, anger, and stress.

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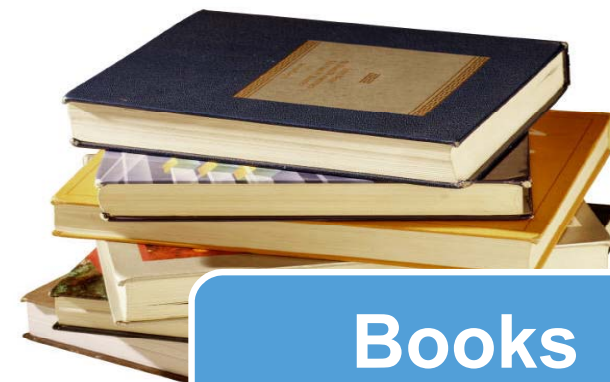
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