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Boyes, A. (2015). *The anxiety toolkit: Strategies for fine-tuning your mind and moving past your stuck points*. New York: Perigee.

This is a self-help book that provides the reader with cognitive and behavioural strategies to manage his or her anxiety and life. The author, Alice Boyes, is a New Zealander who practised as a clinical psychologist in this country from 2008-2013. *The Anxiety Toolkit* is a distillation of her work with clients and it is principally informed by cognitive behavioural psychology. The text is supported by a website (theanxietytoolkit.com) which has resources and links.

Part 1 of Boyes's book is concerned with self-understanding and the meaning of anxiety. The author describes herself as an 'anxious-by-nature person' and she advocates self-acceptance combined with strategies to get past the 'stuck points' in our lives. Part 2 addresses five 'sticking points' that people can have, and these are: hesitancy, rumination, perfectionism, fear of feedback/criticism, and avoidance. The emphasis is distinctively on skills acquisition and, as Boyes says herself, this is not 'one of those saccharine, stick-a-smiley-face-on-it, positive-thinking books.' In Part 3, the author covers various procedural matters. These include the skills learning process and particular strategies for moving anxiety management away from the central focus in a person's life. The last section of *The Anxiety Toolkit* also deals with challenging negative core beliefs and selecting a useful support group.

There are three anti-anxiety strategies, amongst the multitude of techniques that Boyes describes, that might be regarded as particularly appealing or useful. The first of these is replacing self-criticism with self-compassion. People often use self-criticism to attempt to motivate themselves whereas a more accepting approach to past mistakes can provide new energy. A second anti-anxiety technique is to adopt a mastery approach to what you do rather

than a performance focus. People who work from a performance focus always have their self-esteem on the line and, in their minds, they are only as good as their last engagement. By contrast, a person with a mastery focus sees every experience as a learning opportunity and as a chance to do things better. The third strategy is to manage your energy rather than your time. Willpower, according to Boyes, is like computer RAM. 'When you're running too many programs or apps at the same time, your system hangs and freezes.' Instead, it is suggested, you should intentionally slow down, prioritise your tasks, and reduce excess sensory stimulation.

Is *The Anxiety Toolkit* an effective self-help book? Ultimately, this is a question for a research study but, for now, we have a set of five guidelines, or criteria, for self-help books that we can apply. These guidelines were prepared by Susan Krauss Whitbourne (2012) who, like Alice Boyes, blogs for *Psychology Today*. The first criterion that Whitbourne suggests is to check the author's credentials. Boyes does well here, with a doctorate in psychology, clinical experience, and engagement in some serious research. Secondly, the book should mimic a good therapeutic alliance with a relationship defined by establishment, development, and maintenance phases. *The Anxiety Toolkit* pretty much does this through the book's three divisions and with personal questions at the start of chapters. The author's self-disclosures help here as well. The third criterion is concerned with the quality of the writing. In this regard, the author more than meets the challenge of making ideas accessible and she can do so with some flair as shown above. And, as well, there are sentences like these: 'Self-criticism is a fuel source for your rumination fire,' and 'Avoidance will eat you alive psychologically if you don't work on it.'

Whitbourne's guideline number four is 'Decide whether the book will motivate you,' and the fifth guideline is 'Don't be afraid to give it a critical reading.' This book is positive, optimistic, and inclusive; and it avoids the negativity, pessimism, and exclusion of psychiatric diagnoses and knowing best. However, the final criterion, concerning critical thinking, is not as easy to answer. There are a couple of persistent issues with self-help books and one of these is raised by the disclaimer that the author provides at the start of the book: 'The content of this book is intended for general information purposes only and not as a substitute for individual therapy. Not all of the advice may be right for you.' But then Boyes (and the writers of other self-help books) do all they can to personalise the text and to connect with the reader. In addition, there may be a darker side to the light and cheery messages of personal transformation that self-help books convey. As autonomous beings, we may be able to improve ourselves but the subtext to this is that we are also responsible for our present situations.

Finally, is *The Anxiety Toolkit* a useful resource for social workers? In fact, this book could be of great help in work with clients and as a personal aid for practitioners. Social work clients can be disempowered by poverty, unhelpful family relationships, skill deficits, health issues, and other disadvantages which typically are not of their making. Nevertheless, instruction and support in the use of thinking and behavioural strategies that reduce worry and rumination, and hesitancy and avoidance, can only be of assistance to clients alongside other specialist supports. Social workers will also find *The Anxiety Toolkit* relevant to them personally, and especially given the present exigencies associated with their professional roles. Commentators describe the human services and human service organisations in the twenty-first century as challenging intellectually, emotionally, morally, and politically; and

they also say that they are not particularly friendly places to be (McDonald, Craik, Hawkins, & Williams, 2011). In these circumstances, at least some personal anxiety is to be anticipated and practitioners are fortunate in having available Dr Alice Boyes's comprehensive compendium of self-help strategies.

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