

A User's Guide to Therapy: What to Expect and How You Can Benefit

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I'd never been in therapy before becoming a therapist. If I'd read this book prior to training, my development as a therapist would have been greatly enhanced, having seen the process from the client's point of view. By deconstructing the mystery of the therapist encounter, author Kaiser allows it is complex, but nonetheless an understandable process. Her language is approachable and sidesteps the clinical jargon so popular in our field. Absenting the psychiatric terminology and specific diagnoses, she helps 'normalize' the difficulties a client might offer in describing their state. Kaiser includes, from Kate Scharff's *Therapy Demystified*, a list of reasons that people enter therapy that is relatively complete. Throughout this volume, the author should be commended for making the process more one of seeking mental health than one of cure for mental illness.

Kaiser, who is a clinical social worker by training and practice, defines the goal of therapy "to raise your awareness about who you are, what your life is all about, and how you relate to yourself and the world." Following this definition is a gentle defining paragraph focused on awareness and change rather than on symptom reduction.

Early in the book, a focus on boundaries begins with the comment that "your relationship with your therapist is one way." This is a precaution stated and adhered to by all of us but seldom heard by clients. Kaiser, by way of case examples and cogent comments, keeps the focus on the client. It is after all, all about them.

An interesting framework utilized by Kaiser in Chapter 2 is in answering the question, "What makes therapy work?" This section demystifies the client's reasonable question about how talk can make things change. She

illuminates the common factors of change with a ratio, beginning, as all work in clinical social work does, with the client. Forty percent rests squarely on the client and extra-therapeutic circumstances. This surfeit of one's human experience influences how we approach any change we attempt.

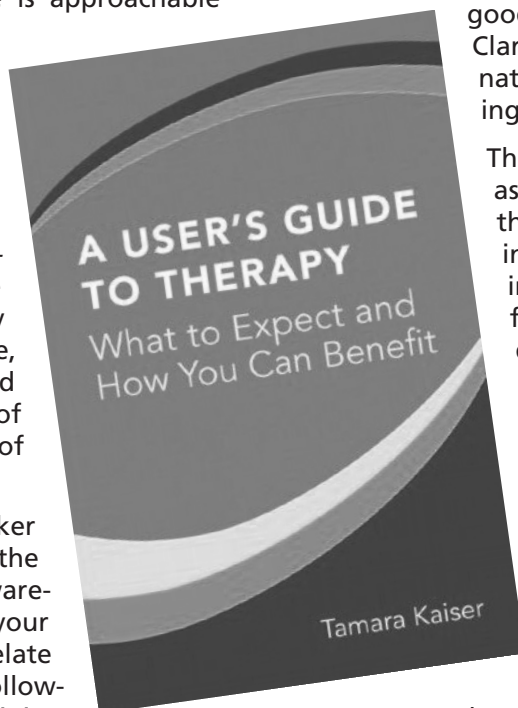
Another 30% of the change process lies within the therapeutic relationship, giving the responsibility to the client to *work with* their therapists rather than *depending on* them to do the work. She ably discourses on the interactive nature of the alliance.

Fifteen percent is attributed to attitude. What level of hope and positive expectation does the client bring to the consultation? It goes a long way in helping the client accept that therapy doesn't always feel good nor does it always flow downstream. Clarifying with the client the uncomfortable nature of therapy goes a long way in helping them to tolerate that very state.

The final factor in change is the 15% ascribed to the technique selected by the therapist. The author does a good job in her discussion of approaches, clarifying the distinctions. The psychodynamic, family systems and CBT approaches are quite extensively reviewed with shorter and less focus on humanism and experiential techniques. It would be worthwhile, should you provide clients with a depiction of your therapy perspective, to review her language. It is direct and clear without psychiatric terminology. A thorough reading would give a client some sense of what process might suit their particular style.

I was most pleased with Kaiser's description of the role of the therapist, juggling the use of power and authority with the self-determination of the client. Recognizing the collaborative nature of therapy and helping the client accept their power within the relationship is a task not always easily accomplished.

Her discussion regarding power and authority has drawn on the work of Marilyn Peterson in her book, *At Personal Risk*. If you haven't read this, put it on your "must read list." She shares insights into our struggle with power and the attendant tension that arises in the relationship with the client. Reading Kaiser's instruction to the client, and Peterson's instruction to the therapist, provides a dialogue well worth reviewing.



A section of the book explores the concept of *Inside Empathy*, defined as the therapist having similarities with the client, i.e., marital status, religious preference, traumatic events, recovery from addictions. The assumption clients make in their value of this concept is explored through case examples. The two-sided coin of having similarities but not feeling the same emotion, or having the same reaction as the client versus the client discounting because you haven't had the same experience is discussed. She offers some balm to this difficulty by emphasizing the concept of shared meaning rather than shared experience.

The author uses the device of Socratic questioning in several sections of the book to help clients in making decisions about their therapy such as treatment modality and stages of change. She ends with illuminating questions to help the client with self-identification within the change process.

Coupled with an enduring perspective of both the client's responsibility and accountability within the therapeutic alliance is straight talk on trust. Our work in creating conceptual frameworks, educating, increasing consciousness and strategically helping clients to grow and integrate is well stated. Safety and trust are explored in the therapeutic alliance. She considers the impact of vulnerability on change and how learning how to trust begins with not trusting.

Deftly handling how these very stimulating elements enhance the alliance and fuel the change process, she reminds us of the sanctity of our role. From resistance to idealization, she manages to give the client permission to question and clarify what's happening in the therapeutic relationship. Ultimately, Kaiser appropriately holds both the client and the therapist responsible for what happens next. ❖

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