

BOOK REVIEWS

The Therapist's Use of Self: Being the Catalyst for Change in Couple and Family Therapy by Matthew D Selekman

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<https://doi.org/10.59874/001c.120137>

Journal of Solution Focused Practices

Vol. 8, Issue 1, 2024

This is a seminal new work on the effective use of the therapist's own self in therapeutic practice. Blending theory, practical advice and real-world examples, it encourages therapists to embrace their authenticity and humanity, ultimately fostering more genuine and effective therapeutic relationships.

The Therapist's Use of Self: Being the Catalyst for Change in Couple and Family Therapy by Matthew D Selekman

Routledge, 2024, 284 pages, ISBN 9781032369174, £29.99 paperback (Kindle edition available)

The Therapist's Use of Self by Matthew D Selekman is a seminal work that offers a comprehensive exploration of one of the most critical aspects of therapeutic practice: the effective and intentional use of the therapist's own self in the therapeutic process. Selekman, an experienced and respected clinician, draws on his extensive background in family therapy and solution-focused therapy to provide a rich, practical guide for therapists at all stages of their careers. In this text, "use of self" refers to the therapist's ability to use their personality and special skills to guide clients to achieve their goals. It could include such things as personal presence, curiosity, playfulness, transparency, and storytelling.

The book has several key sections addressing different facets of the therapist's self. It opens with an enjoyable two-chapter exploration of the contribution and position of ten pioneers of family therapy on use of self, which felt rather like visiting some old friends, and does provide a springboard for a useful critical discussion on decision making in practice, pattern recognition, and the use of evidence-based wisdom. Chapter 4, *The Therapist's Use of Self Toolkit*, presents eleven different ways we can use ourselves in the therapeutic process, and includes a delicious recipe for roasted wild mushroom lasagne in a pumpkin sauce – you will need to read the chapter to find out why! This Toolkit provides practical strategies for

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implementing the concepts of self-use in therapy, emphasising the importance of listening, responding, and the therapeutic relationship. Selekmán underscores that the therapist's self is not a static tool, but a dynamic and evolving part of the therapeutic process, with the aim being transformation of the lives of people we work with.

Subsequent chapters delve into specific techniques and strategies, with an emphasis on keeping sessions upbeat, fun and meaningful. Selekmán provides detailed case examples, illustrating how to use the Toolkit ideas to foster deeper connections with clients and facilitate meaningful change. He also discusses potential pitfalls and challenges, offering practical advice on getting unstuck, using virtual/telehealth approaches, expanding the therapist's range and style, and providing a helpful and clear framework for the therapist's development from beginner to master. Finally, he surveys the future landscape, challenging therapists to come up with their own unique contribution to the field.

One of the book's greatest strengths is its practical orientation. Selekmán discusses theoretical concepts but also provides concrete examples and exercises that can immediately be applied to practice. His writing is accessible and engaging, making complex ideas comprehensible and relatable. The case studies are particularly valuable, providing real-world applications of the concepts discussed, and highlighting various nuanced ways therapists can use their selves in therapeutic contexts.

Another notable strength is Selekmán's emphasis in Chapter 8 on cultural competence and diversity, as part of the therapist's framework for development. He acknowledges the diverse backgrounds of both therapists and clients, and discusses how these differences can impact the therapeutic relationship. While this focus on inclusivity makes the book relevant to a wide audience, and enhances its applicability in contemporary, multicultural therapeutic settings, I feel it could have been more present throughout the book. *The Therapist's Use of Self* is a comprehensive and insightful guide, though it may seem somewhat dense for novice therapists or those unfamiliar with solution-focused therapy, and some readers might find the extensive case studies and theoretical discussions overwhelming. For those willing to engage deeply with the material, however, the book offers invaluable insights that could significantly enhance therapeutic practice.

Overall, *The Therapist's Use of Self* is an essential resource for therapists seeking to deepen their understanding and practice of self-use in therapy, blending theory, practical advice and real-world examples. It encourages therapists to embrace their authenticity and humanity, ultimately fostering more genuine and effective therapeutic relationships. I recommend you sit down with a cup of your favourite beverage and enjoy this wonderfully readable book!

Read more about the book on the publisher's website: [The Therapist's Use of Self | Being the Catalyst for Change in Couple \(taylorfrancis.com\)](https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781032044444)

Submitted: June 06, 2024 BST, Accepted: June 11, 2024 BST



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