

Staying Sane in the Fast Lane: Emotional Health in the 21st Century.

Antony D. Kidman. Delphian Books. 2011, 152pp. \$25.00 (softcover).

In *Staying Sane in the Fast Lane: Emotional Health in the 21st Century*, Antony Kidman addresses both global and personal challenges individuals face in maintaining balance in the modern age. In the first chapter of the book, Kidman addresses the impact of current world issues and modern pressures on emotional health. In later chapters, he provides a clear introduction to key principles of cognitive behavior therapy and then offers techniques and examples for specific emotional challenges individuals may be facing, such as anxiety, depression and mood disorders, anger, and even psychosis. One of the most impressive things about the book is how much ground Kidman covers in such a slim volume while still maintaining both conceptual clarity and clinical utility.

In the initial chapter, Kidman concisely and clearly outlines many of the major changes of the last several decades (e.g., the information technology revolution) and modern global challenges (e.g., overpopulation, limited resources and environmental sustainability), as well as how these have impacted the individual and the family unit. For instance, he suggests that the information technology revolution has resulted in a number of new stresses, including information overload, a blurring of work and private life, erosion of privacy, and often isolating effects when face-to-face communication is so easily replaced by digital communication. Meanwhile, families in the developed world have become increasingly filiocentric (i.e., child-centered), with children becoming less financially useful to the family and parents devoting increasing energy and resources to raising them. For most of us, these are the realities of the current age, such that we may rarely stop to ponder how the modern cultural and physical environment presents specific challenges for mental health. Kidman highlights this for readers and also presents practical suggestions for how to manage specific modern challenges (e.g., tips for how to take advantage of technology without being overwhelmed by it).

The second chapter of the book provides an overview of current mental health issues faced by consumers, available treatments, and factors that often interfere with effective treatment, including public stigma and self-stigma regarding mental illness. Kidman offers a succinct overview of the history of psychotherapy and also highlights more recent developments in treatment. He ends this chapter with an introduction to cognitive behavior therapy, complete with a figure depicting the ABC model and a table of common irrational beliefs with examples of disputing statements for each.

Having described modern stressors individuals face and provided the CBT framework, the remaining chapters of the book are devoted to specific types of emotional disturbance: anxiety, depression, anger, and psychosis. Each of these chapters presents an overview of the relevant disorder(s) (including how each is understood from a CBT perspective), discussion of currently available treatments (including both psychotherapy and medications, when relevant), and specific cognitive and behavioral strategies for managing symptoms. In addition to highlighting typical thinking errors and ways to rationally dispute them for the specific emotional issue at hand, each chapter also presents a number of topics and strategies that are uniquely relevant to understanding or effectively coping with the specific emotional issue. For example, In the chapter on anxiety, Kidman provides examples of irrational thoughts likely to produce anxiety along with a suggestion that one way to decatastrophize in the face of anxiety is to simply insert the phrase, “So what if . . .” before an anxiety-generating thought. For the

individual gripped with anxiety, this simple suggestion may provide them with a novel, more rational perspective. In addition to describing relaxation techniques, the book also instructs readers in direct exposure and includes a worksheet for creating a target list of anxiety-provoking situations for graded practice. Kidman is truly interested in both cognitive and behavioral strategies. The chapter on depression provides an overview of common cognitive distortions, and in addition to suggesting ways to dispute these errors (e.g., the disputing strategy, mindfulness), Kidman also includes suggestions of mood-changing activities, including an extensive list of pleasant activities. The chapter on anger includes a list of “anger-encouraging” and “anger-reducing” statements, and it also guides readers in making a distinction between aggressive and assertive behaviors. Finally, in the chapter on psychosis and schizophrenia, Kidman discusses coping strategies for individuals and their family, and he describes ways in which CBT can be helpful in conjunction with medication (e.g., hallucinations may be disputed or made less important).

Each chapter is organized with clear headings and also includes helpful diagrams and figures illustrating the concepts for readers. Throughout each of these chapters, Kidman maintains a highly compassionate tone, normalizing the issues at hand, while also highlighting the importance of taking responsibility for managing symptoms. For example, in the chapter on depression, he states, “We all have this tendency [low frustration tolerance] and we need to learn how to put up with discomfort in order to achieve our goals” (p. 70).

The scope of this book is impressive. *Staying Sane in the Fast Lane: Emotional Health in the 21st Century* represents an excellent self-help book for readers seeking better stress management skills in the techno-age or a clearer understanding of emotional struggles related to: anxiety, depression, anger, or psychosis. Kidman concisely covers a wide array of topics in clear prose and somehow manages never to shortchange his audience, offering concrete suggestions for the challenges of modern life and highlighting evidence-based coping strategies for specific disorders.

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