

Prologue

If I Believe in Therapy, Why Write a Self-Help Book?

My name is Nina Danielson. I am a psychotherapist who has been in private practice for many years. Actually, I have been counseling people for over thirty years and it is my opinion that self-help books, in and of themselves, cannot provide the same in-depth help for people that individual counseling can provide. So, if I feel so strongly about that, why am I writing a self-help book? Please bear with me for a few minutes. First, let me explain why I think therapy is important and then I will explain why I have written this book.

I strongly believe in the therapeutic process and in the importance of seeing a therapist when one is working on difficult life issues and/or has developed unpleasant symptoms. Please understand that this holds true for me as well as for others. Therapists are not above needing therapy. They are human, too. In fact, the best therapists have seen therapists themselves. How can you take anyone further than you have gone? The relationship between the therapist and the client is a very important one, and this **therapeutic relationship** and the trust that develops within it is part of the healing process itself.

Another reason that I believe in one to one therapy is that it is the nature of our **egos** to erect **defenses** early in life to protect us from knowing things that we feel we would be better off not knowing. However, later in life, when these defenses are no longer working as effectively, we start to develop symptoms such as **anxiety** or **depression** and it is very difficult to work through our problems entirely on our own precisely because of the nature of our old defenses. We continue to protect ourselves from knowing things that we now need to know. Our old defenses still believe that we should not know these things and psychotherapy is, in part, the process of the therapist helping us to challenge these old defenses.

This process enables us to deal with the material that we now must deal with and are strong enough to deal with in order to resolve our problems. For example, let's say that my father was someone that I loved very much but who also hurt me in many ways. If I continue to deny that he hurt me because I believe this knowledge to be too painful, I might continually wind up with men who hurt me, never understanding why I do so and hurting myself over and over anyway.

We can't really give therapy to ourselves

In other words, therapy is something we really cannot do entirely on our own because we remain defensive and we cannot really gain full insight into ourselves due to the nature of those defenses. Therefore, an important part of what another person in a therapeutic relationship provides to us is help in recognizing those defenses and beginning to dismantle them when they are no longer benefiting us.

Another important part of the therapeutic relationship is the availability of the therapist to be there for us and with us as we dismantle unhealthy defenses and look at some of the material and feelings against which we have been defending. Obviously, a lot of that material is material that we had to deal with all by ourselves as young children and it would absolutely be re-traumatizing to go back to that material all alone once again. In fact, that is one of the reasons why we cannot completely work on ourselves, because we keep defending, because we are afraid to go back and deal with it all alone.

Therefore, a good relationship, a trusting relationship, and a close relationship with a skilled and caring therapist helps us to revisit some of the material that we are defending against that may be frightening or painful or **anger**-provoking, but we are not all alone this time as we once were in childhood. This time we have someone with us to understand, to help, and to support us. Therefore, we are not re-traumatizing ourselves by going back to the war all alone. We have someone's hand to hold now and to help us understand the nature of what we have been through.

A good therapist is not always easy to find

A good therapist is sometimes hard to find. Ideally, you should check out several. Preferably, ones that have been recommended to you by people you respect. This, however, does not necessarily mean that you will have a rapport with them. Remember, you are the consumer. You have a right to find someone that you feel at ease with, someone that is "your type" and that you do not feel judged by. A relationship of trust is hard to build and takes time. Start by working with someone with whom you feel comfortable. Do not second guess yourself. Connecting and relating are very important in the therapeutic relationship and you will not be able to ultimately build the trust that is needed to deal with the past if you do not feel safe in the present. In addition, you might ask, "Is therapy always about the past?" It should only be about the past in so far as the past is affecting the present.

I once had a client referred to me by a therapist she had been seeing in another state. She had recently relocated and needed a new therapist. As soon as she sat down, I could tell how uncomfortable she was. She appeared to be much more uncomfortable than is usual at a first meeting. I encouraged her to talk about it and she said that if she had known what I had looked like and how I related she never would have chosen me as her therapist. She said that she wanted someone who was quieter and more withdrawn than I was and that my energy scared her.

I immediately suggested that she see someone else; someone with whom she would feel more comfortable and I said that I would be happy to give her some referral names. Then she asked if perhaps she should make herself stay with me and work on her **fear** of assertive people, even though she was scared of me. I told her that, in my opinion, I definitely did not think so. I said that she should find someone who didn't threaten her and with whom she felt comfortable. Only with someone like that could she begin to get over her fears. Fortunately, I know enough people who enjoy my energetic presence, and I did not have to struggle with taking it as a personal rejection, which obviously it was not. However, even if I had felt rejected, the purpose of therapy is not to protect the therapist, nor is the purpose of therapy to re-traumatize one's self. In real estate, they say that the three most important things are "location, location and location." In therapy, the

three most important things are “relationship, relationship and relationship.” Pick someone you can relate to; someone who does not instill fear or **shame**. Only then can you begin to work together to develop trust.

You can't live in your therapist's office

So here comes the big question: Why then have I written a self-help book if I believe so strongly in therapy? Is this not a contradiction to my beliefs? I do not think so at all. We are sentient beings. In or out of therapy we ask ourselves questions and seek answers that are not always readily available. Although self-help books may not take the place of therapy, they provide just what they say they provide- ways to help our selves. The purpose of this book is to help us deal with the themes that tend to repeat and repeat themselves and, from time to time, clog our **psyches**. It is to help us deal with the material and feelings that we do have to deal with when we are on our own, in or in-between therapy, or when our therapist is away. These themes are common themes for many of us. We will look at some of the ways in which we may have found to cope with these feelings in the past that are now maladaptive and we will try to learn new ways of coping.

Our lives are not spent in the therapist's office. There are those minutes and hours between sessions, those periods of time when our therapists are away and those periods of time when we may choose not to be in therapy. Actually, the majority of time we are just working out our lives on our own.

It is to this majority of time that this book is addressed. As a therapist, I have realized over the years that we all struggle with certain themes that repeat themselves over and over again. Moreover, often therapy is a spiral staircase upward. We think we have dealt with an issue only to find ourselves spiraling around it once again, perhaps with new understanding and with growth but still dealing with the same issue nonetheless. This book is meant to be a kind of self-help, reference guide to working with your psyche on your own. For example, there are times where we may need to call a plumber; the times we may need an entire remodeling of our bathroom; we may need a new septic field: the times when our toilet has completely broken or when there is an unreachable clog. However, there are times where we run for the plunger or use a snake to fix the problem ourselves. Moreover, these times are more frequent than the calls to the plumber. Therefore, this book is about issues and tools. It is about using a snake and a plunger on your own psyches when there are some overflowing issues that we need to understand and attend to ourselves.

Learning to use a plunger on our psyches

Some people might find the toilet imagery to be offensive but it really is very applicable because, in reality, we find ourselves dealing with the same old shit over and over again. How many times have we said, “I thought I was over this shit” or “this shit again?” Therefore, that is what this book is about. It is about how to deal with our issues on our own or with our therapists when in therapy. To begin with, I think it will be helpful to have some very basic, elementary understandings of our toilet bowls and toilet tanks so that we can use these basic tools. In other words, some basic understanding of the psyche so that we will know how to work with it.

In arranging the chapters, I had the following thoughts in mind: Firstly, I want to convey to you some understandings of the basic structure of the self, both biologically and psychologically. I then go on to discuss the defenses we have erected in order to protect this self. I then discuss certain serious assaults to the self such as depression and grief. The remainder of the book discusses the challenges that our freed selves face in one way or another to preserve their wholeness and yet to interact closely and meaningfully with others.

SUMMARY

- Self-help books cannot replace the therapeutic process or relationship.
- Due to the nature of our psychic defenses, we cannot dismantle them on our own and we must get beneath them in order to understand our feelings and change our behaviors.
- It is sometimes important to revisit our pasts in order to understand the present and it would be re-traumatizing to attempt to do this alone.
- The nature of the therapeutic relationship requires trust.
- Certain feelings and behaviors tend to keep coming back no matter how hard we think we have worked on them. This book provides some intellectual understanding of what may be going on and provides some self-help tools that are useful to have.

WARNING SIGNS

- If you strongly react or perhaps over intensely respond to some of the material in this Book, you should return to therapy or be sure to bring up the issues with your therapist.
- If you feel shamed or misunderstood by your therapist or feel a lack of trust, if the relationship is new, consider finding someone else. If this happens after some bond has formed, you must address this with your therapist. If it is not adequately resolved, consider finding another therapist.
- Find therapists who have had therapy themselves and have a sense of what you are experiencing as a client and has dismantled some of their own defenses in order to take you further.

COPING STRATEGIES

- Talk to your therapist.
- Ask your doctor or trusted friend to recommend a therapist.

- Remember that seeking help is a sign of strength and not weakness.
- You are the consumer. Make sure your needs are met.
- Get support from a friend but remember that they cannot be your therapist.
- Read the rest of this book to learn some specific coping strategies you can do on your own when you need to.