

Bibliotherapy:

A photograph of a person with dark hair tied back, seen from the side, reading an open book. They are sitting outdoors, leaning against a tree trunk. The background shows a lush green field and more trees under bright, natural light. A large blue banner is overlaid at the top, and an orange banner is at the bottom.

What is bibliotherapy? • How does it help wellbeing? • How does the scheme work? • Recommended books • Useful websites

The Power of Words

What is Bibliotherapy?

The use of books for therapeutic purposes is known as 'bibliotherapy'. Self help books have been used in this way for many years and are now being recommended as a means of providing psychological therapy for people experiencing emotional and psychological difficulties.

The effectiveness of bibliotherapy has been well established in clinical trials. Bibliotherapy has been recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) UK as a useful start in treating mild and moderate depression, anxiety and panic and some other mental health problems.

In a position paper on mental health and primary care in the UK the Royal College of General Practitioners said: "Personal choice and autonomy are critical in maintaining mental health. Often people want to help themselves, approaching the family and peer group before coming into contact with primary care. When asked, people repeatedly say that they want to learn how to manage their own problems for themselves as well as draw upon resources in the community".

Bibliotherapy in Ireland

In March 2007, the North Inner City Partnership in Primary Care (Dublin), in collaboration with Dublin City Public Libraries, piloted the first book prescription scheme in Ireland, led by Elaine Martin, HSE Senior Psychologist. The objective of the North Inner City Book Prescription Scheme was to give GPs, mental health professionals and patients choice in the treatment approach to some mild and moderate mental health difficulties. The scheme provided GPs and other professionals with a list of high quality self-help books. Practitioners in turn brought these books to the attention of their patients and clients who were likely to benefit from their use. The books were stocked by local libraries and therefore readily accessible. The appetite for a self-help approach seemed to be great, with over 2,500 books issued from six inner city libraries in the first year of the scheme. Since that time similar local initiatives have sprung up throughout the country.

In February 2009 the Library Council of Ireland, the HSE and the Irish College of General Practitioners introduced *The Power of Words* scheme – a national list of 30 books to support and aid persons to gain insight into and treat their emotional and psychological problems.

The Book Selection

Many thousands of self-help books exist and while the best of these are highly effective, others are not so useful. In preparation for the 2013 scheme, hundreds of the best evidence-based titles were read and reviewed by willing psychologists and General Practitioners working in Ireland. Based on their recommendations a long list of 97 books and a short list of 42 books have been compiled. Most of the books chosen are written by leading psychologists with clinical expertise and many present self-help versions of established treatment programmes.

Over the past year the book selection has been revised and updated, reflecting and incorporating matters of concern to public health, developments in the treatment of various difficulties and the support needs of carers too.

The short and long lists include books for adults on the common psychological problems that people experience, including depression, anxiety, panic, eating difficulties, stress and low self-esteem.

The short and long lists include books for children and families on topics such as parenting, worries, bullying, bereavement, separation and eating issues.

150-word summary reviews are available on all 97 titles.

Accessing the Books and Reviews

These lists will now be available to all GPs and circulated to all Public Libraries. Library staff can assist and guide users of the bibliotherapy collection. In addition to Customer Care and Disability Awareness training, library staff have also attended training to support the bibliotherapy initiative and the delivery of library services to people with mental health difficulties in general.

Most of the listed books are also available for purchase in good bookshops and electronically.

The lists, as well as reviews for all 97 titles, may be accessed at the following web addresses (URLs shortened for convenience):

- **HSE Website:** <http://tinyurl.com/mob5r7x>
- **Dublin City Libraries Website:** <http://tinyurl.com/lo5eqhl>

Who Might Benefit?

Book based therapy will not be suitable for everyone, but it is certainly appropriate for a proportion of those who consult their GP or other healthcare professionals with a psychological problem. For those who are able to make use of bibliotherapy, the books highlight a problem-solving approach to recovery and emphasise the potential of self-management. The person becomes knowledgeable about their difficulty and is encouraged to engage in self-monitoring, self-assessment and guided self-treatment. The emphasis is on the individual's active involvement and empowerment in recovery instead of, or in conjunction with, medication to deal with the problem. Bibliotherapy is ideally suited to a person who has a good level of literacy, who is highly motivated to work independently to tackle his or her own problem, and who is familiar with the process of following a structured 'recipe' in a book (as in a cookbook or DIY book).

150-word summaries plus further titles on a broader range of issues can be found on the website*

 Suitable for Carers  Mindfulness Approach

Adult Issues	Book Title	Author(s)	Year	Comment / See website* for 150-word summaries
Addiction	7 Tools to Beat Addiction	Stanton Peele	2004	Clear. For those seeking to overcome addiction without recourse to a 12 step programme.
	Get Your Loved One Sober: Alternatives To Nagging, Pleading, and Threatening 	Robert Meyers & Brenda Wolfe	2003	Supportive and clear. For readers concerned about their loved one's drinking.
Alcohol	An Introduction to Sensible Drinking 	Marcantonio Spada	2001	A non-judgemental easy read, this booklet will help people to take control of their drinking.
Anger	Overcoming Anger and Irritability	William Davies	2000	Based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Manageable.
Anxiety	An Introduction To Coping With Anxiety 	Brenda Hogan & Lee Brosnan	2007	Accessible. Easy to read. Overview of symptoms and structured suggestions for overcoming anxiety.
	Things Might Go Terribly Horribly Wrong: A Guide to Life Liberated From Anxiety 	Kelly Wilson & Tony DuFrene	2010	Describes the key areas of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for anxiety. Concise and approachable.
Anxiety: Panic	An Introduction To Coping With Panic 	Charles Young	2007	Simply written, easily understood. Not information overload yet enough to be of practical help.
	When Panic Attacks	Aine Tubridy	2003	Engaging, clear, comprehensive. Educates and offers techniques.
Anxiety: Social Anxiety	Overcoming Social Anxiety and Shyness	Gillian Butler	2003	Very readable. Detailed CBT instruction. Suitable for both mild and intense anxiety.
	I Think They Think: Overcoming Social Phobia DVD	Ronald M. Rapee	1998	Overview of social anxiety and practical strategies for overcoming it. Real life examples. Touching.
Anxiety: Stress	An Introduction To Coping With Stress 	Lee Brosnan	2010	Helpful for identifying stressors. Practical strategies.
	The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook (6th Ed)	Martha Davis et al.	2008	Offers a broad range of techniques for relaxation and stress management. Attractive, easy-to-read.
	A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook (CD included) 	Bob Stahl, Elisha Goldstein & Saki Santorelli	2010	Good ways to relax. Nice exercises. Promotes disengaging from thoughts.
Anxiety: Traumatic Stress	An Introduction To Coping With Post Traumatic Stress 	Ann Wetmore	2010	Practical book. Clear description of the impact of traumatic stress and steps for coping. Helpful for carers.
Assertiveness	Assert Yourself	Gael Lindenfield	2001	Attractive book which builds awareness and skills.
Bereavement	An Introduction To Coping With Grief 	Sue Morris	2010	Clear practical book on recognising and coping with grief. Excellent.
	The Courage To Grieve	Judy Tatelbaum	1980	Guides you in a positive way through the process of grief. Instils courage.
Childhood Sexual Abuse (Adult Survivors)	An Introduction To Overcoming Childhood Trauma 	Helen Kennerley	2011	Comprehensive introduction to understanding, coping with and recovering from the effects of childhood trauma.
	Breaking Free: Help for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse	Carolyn Ainscough & Kay Toon	2000	Sensitively written. Demonstrates the range of experience and feelings involved. Optimistic. Strategies for coping.
Dementia	The Simplicity of Dementia 	Huib Buijssen	2005	Informative and accessible. Uses metaphor in a way that makes the reader at ease with the topic.
Depression	Coming Through Depression (CD included) 	Tony Bates	2011	Clearly written. Explains what depression is, how to recover and stay mentally healthy using mindfulness.
	An Introduction To Coping With Depression 	Lee Brosnan & Brenda Hogan	2007	A clear self-help guide with practical exercises that the reader can work through.
Depression: Postnatal	Overcoming Postnatal Depression: A Five Areas Approach	Chris Williams, Roch Cantwell & Karen Robertson	2008	Very clear and easily understood. A workbook that will appeal to many readers.
Eating Problems	An Introduction To Coping With Eating Problems 	Gillian Todd	2011	Simple, informative. Practical tips. Useful for family and carer.
	Overcoming Bulimia Nervosa & Binge-Eating	Peter Cooper	1993	Comprehensive CBT-based treatment programme.
	Anorexia Nervosa: A Survival Guide for Families, Friends and Sufferers 	Janet Treasure	1997	A clearly written educational book containing practical advice. Not a step-by-step treatment guide. Good start.
Obsessive Compulsive Problems	An Introduction To Coping With OCD 	Lee Brosnan	2007	Simple. Informative. Good illustrations and techniques.
Personal Development	Change for the Better: Self-help Through Practical Psychotherapy	Elizabeth Wilde McCormick	2002	Structured personal exploration based on Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT). Links past with present. Accessible.
	The Happiness Trap 	Russ Harris	2008	Based on Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) this book helps the reader to deal with negative emotional patterns.
Relationships	Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations For A Lifetime of Love	Sue Johnson	2011	Compassionate. Helps identify negative patterns and helps forge an emotional bond using Emotion Focused Couple Therapy.
Self-Esteem	An Introduction to Improving Your Self-Esteem 	Melanie Fennell with Lee Brosnan	2011	Clear and accessible. Explains in a concise manner how low self-esteem develops and how it is maintained. A good introduction to the concept.
	The Confidence Gap 	Russ Harris	2011	Practical self-help book based on mindfulness. It is engaging and very accessible with real world examples.

* See Useful Websites overleaf for Bibliotherapy links.

See more books overleaf...

Child & Family Issues	Book Title	Author(s)	Year	Comment / See website* for 150-word summaries
Anxiety	What To Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide To Anxiety 6+	Dawn Huebner	2005	Effective anxiety management strategies are presented in a format easily accessible to children and parents.
Bereavement	Finding a Way Through When Someone Close has Died	Pat Mood & Lesley Whittaker	2001	An interactive book written for children who have lost a loved one. It encourages them to articulate their thoughts and feelings.
	Helping Children Cope With the Loss Of A Loved One	William C. Kroen	1996	Astutely written book about how children of varying ages deal with the death of a loved one and how to support them.
Bullying	How to Handle Bullies, Teasers and other Meanies Age 8-12	Kate Cohen-Posie	1995	Useful and simple. Nice techniques and responses to help kids deal with a bully. Child-friendly.
	Bullying: A Parents' Guide	Jennifer Thompson	2005	An educational guide to help parents prevent and deal with bullying sensitively.
Eating	How To Get Your Kids To Eat... But Not Too Much	Ellyn Smith	1987	Helps parents manage their child's eating. Warm, friendly and supportive.
Parenting	The Incredible Years – A Troubleshooting Guide for Parents of Children aged 2-8 years	Carolyn Webster-Stratton	2006	Covers relationship-building, discipline, managing one's own feelings, common behaviour problems.
	Parent Power – Bringing Up Responsible Children and Teenagers	John Sharry	2002	Good general guide covering key principles of parenting 4-18 year olds. Easy to read.
	Parenting is Child's Play: The Teenage Years	David Coleman	2010	Great book outlining that when your child is too old for timeouts and sticker chart all that is left is communication.
Separation	When Parents Separate: Helping Your Children Cope	John Sharry et al	2001	Very simply written and easy to read. Child-focused. Deals with parents' problems and how they impact on children too.

* See Useful Websites below for Bibliotherapy links.

The list above is the final list of 42 core books that has been recommended for placement in all libraries in Ireland. This list may be added to by local services to meet the needs of the patients in any particular area.

Useful websites

Bibliotherapy Lists and Reviews

HSE Website: <http://tinyurl.com/mob5r7x>

Dublin City Libraries Website: <http://tinyurl.com/lo5eqhl>

Adult Mental Health

www.aware.ie

www.grow.ie

www.bodywhys.ie

www.drugsinfo.ie

www.alzheimer.ie

www.headwayireland.ie

www.mentalhealthireland.ie

www.yourmentalhealth.ie

www.irishadvocacynetwork.com

www.rcpsych.ac.uk

www.mind.org.uk

www.mhcirl.ie

www.hse.ie

www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/selfhelp

Youth Mental Health

www.reachout.com

www.spunout.ie

www.youth.ie

Children & Families

www.barnardos.ie

www.childrensrights.ie

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

www.endchildpoverty.ie

www.ispcc.ie

www.irishhealth.com

Other

www.carersireland.com

www.fedvol.ie

www.hse-ncs.ie