



On Being a Therapist

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For more than thirty years, *On Being a Therapist* has inspired generations of mental health professionals to explore the most private and sacred aspects of their work helping others. In this thoroughly revised and updated fifth edition, Jeffrey Kottler explores many of the challenges that therapists face in their practices today, including pressures from increased technology, economic realities, and advances in theory and technique. He also explores the stress factors that are brought on from managed care bureaucracy, conflicts at work, and clients' own anxiety and depression. This new edition includes updated sources, new material on technology, new problems that therapists face, and two new chapters: "On Being a Therapeutic Storyteller-and Listener" and "On Being a Client: How to Get the Most from Therapy." Generations of students and practitioners in counseling, clinical psychology, social work, psychotherapy, marriage and family therapy, and human services have found comfort and confidence in *On Being a Therapist*, and this Fifth Edition -- intended to be the author's last major update to the seminal work -- only builds upon this solid foundation as it continues to educate helping professionals everywhere.

On Being a Therapist Details

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Zach Adams says

Functioning a lot like a memoir, Kottler goes through the mind of not only other therapists' minds, but his own as well. As candid as a therapist gets, Kottler explores many different unspoken truths regarding therapy and being a therapist. I found his ideas on letting the client change YOU as opposed to the other way around most helpful as well as his theory that no therapist can be completely unbiased. This epistemological truth is found in any professional arena whether the public admits it or not.

Recommended to those just entertaining the idea of being a therapist, or just starting to practice even though they have been in psych classes for many years. Many of his comments are things you have never heard or should hear again.

Gwendoline Van says

Kottler weighs the pros and cons of being a therapist, asking the curious cat to assess their own motivations, the "why" behind their interest in the profession, while he paints a realistic portrait of the trade. Like so many professions, therapists also face the perils of burnout, ego, and loss of compassion, all normal arcs in the course of the career, ones that either signal our exit from the profession or deeper insight and revelation.

An interesting read, one that periodically rambles on, *On Being A Therapist* sometimes seems to better reveal the author's motivations than the trade itself with a heavy emphasis on prestige and authority. Happily, the book culminates in spiritual, contemplative, and creative expression and potential as driving forces for the profession.

Leanne Hunt says

This book is a real gem. As someone who has worked in the counselling field and enjoys reading books on psychology, I found it most insightful. The author shows a real passion for helping people in therapy and a real commitment to the equipping of therapists themselves. Each chapter addresses a separate area of concern and his anecdotes are both fascinating and true to life.

I enjoyed the frank style of the writing in particular. The field of therapy is fraught with complications and demands a great deal from the people who care for the mentally and emotionally disturbed. I appreciated the humility of the author in sharing many of his own failings, as well as his honest passion for high standards and expertise. Although this book portrays the career of a therapist in raw, unsentimental terms, it nevertheless makes one admire those who devote their lives to understanding the depths of the human psyche. I highly recommend it to anyone in or approaching the field of therapy.

Angela says

I've been calling this book "supervision in a book" because Kottler touches on everything that is important and confusing and exciting about being a therapist. This is a must read for all new therapists as well as any experienced therapist who needs a reminder of why he or she became a therapist in the first place.

Rob Freund says

There are some books that pretty much every would-be or practicing therapist ought to read during their tenure as a clinician. I believe *On Being a Therapist* to be one of them. Granted, there are also some books that ought to be approached with a certain measure of commitment, and Kottler's book fits with that sentiment. I've had a copy of *Les Misérables* sitting on my bookshelf for years now; I've promised myself that someday I'll read it, but a 1,000 page novel takes serious dedication to work through! In some ways, Kottler's book is like to *Les Misérables*. Granted, *On Being a Therapist* is only 320 pages of actual content, but it's a heavy read; I wouldn't suggest questing on it lightly!

Nevertheless, here's why I think it's worth your time. There are things a therapist deals with; questions, concerns, and burdens with which we wrestle during our training and practice. Sometimes, it's easy to think that those issues are our own, and unique from other therapist's experiences. Kottler drives home (sometimes with unnerving astuteness) the universality and homogeneity of our problems, our concerns, our issues. In some ways it was almost a disappointment to discover that I'm not so special after all. Questions of ethics, of morality, of "how in the world do I help people?" and "how can I maintain my sanity?" were all there, written exactly as I'd thought of them before, and usually more eloquently. There is an element of commiseration in *On Being a Therapist* that makes you feel like part of a tribe. Perhaps that is the true gift of Kottler's book. It sends the message, "You are not alone."

Kottler also does not sugarcoat who we are or what we do. At times reading the book was a bucket of ice-water on my pre-professional enthusiasm. He calls out the dark side of counseling; our narcissistic impulses, the stubborn hypocrisy in our personal versus professional lives, the intoxication of power we feel over influencing lives. He also describes with disturbing clarity the wear and tear of counseling on the therapist and other associated dangers. Sometimes while reading I wasn't sure if this book might not be intended as some kind of an informed consent document for the would-be practitioner!

All in all, *On Being a Therapist* is a frank discussion and dissection of the counseling profession. It's at once inspiring and tiring, because Kottler presents an un-photoshopped portrait of what we do - good, bad and ugly. I confess that as a novice therapist I want the haze and sparkle of idealism. I want unrealistic promises of change, goodness, and fairytale heroics of the heart. But let's be honest - having all of that in a book (and in real life) would cheapen what we do. Instead, Kottler offers the profession as it is: fraught with risk, but if entered with open eyes and an open heart, incredibly rewarding.

This review, and others on psychology related books, can be found on my blog: robfreund.wordpress.com

Rose Boyer says

I did not really enjoy this book. I was assigned it in a graduate school class and read the first half even

though it was not assigned that way. I then followed the course and after it was over I grudgingly finished reading over a period of 3/4 of a year. This author is terribly negative and repeats himself ad infinitum. At the end of each very negative chapter he would add a page or two of positive thoughts and rebukes of his negative thinking. Although he has some positive things to say, overall I disliked this book very much.

Carter says

I've read a lot of psych books in the past 6 years but this was by far the most useful. Kottler provides the reader with an honest, raw, uncensored look at being a mental health professional. As a graduate student in Clinical Counseling I found his commentary to be at times frightening, really challenging me to reflect on the path I've chosen by confronting me with the bad and the ugly. But then there is the good! and it is so good, so uplifting and inspiring. Still challenging, but worthwhile. This book came at the perfect time in my program, a time where I was being tested by my professors and asked to answer that question "how much do you really want to be a counselor and what does that title mean to you?" Kottler's book was an indispensable part of my process of defining exactly what being a mental health professional means, in general and on a personal level.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone thinking of pursuing a career in mental health care (it is applicable to a variety of professions including social work but most of the content is specific to one-on-one sessions more indicative of counseling and psychology). If you are already on that path, even if you've been in the field for years, this is a must-read.

Lisa says

A broad overview of challenges faced by therapists that had potential to be informative, but was overshadowed by the author's cynicism. He might need to revisit the chapter on burnout.

Kyu says

I was excited to read this, but the author lost me inch by inch through the book. I found it to skim too shallowly on subjects that seemed haphazardly selected for discussion. And honestly, the author's cynical and compassionless attitude really seeped through the page and turned me off. He seemed to take it for granted that everyone was as cynical as he and I was not willing to enter into that assumption with him. If you're looking for something like this but something a bit more affirming and (I think) truer to the compassion that should be the center to therapy, read Irwin Yalom's work. This is not to say that I don't think therapists are fully capable of cynicism, boredom, burn-out, loss of compassion, etc. but I wouldn't so easily leap to the conclusion that they are in the same state of mind as the author.

Cameron says

I enjoyed reading this no-nonsense book on becoming a counselor. The author has a writing style that is straight-forward, friendly, easy to read (much better than a textbook) and engaging. The author discusses the

issues in becoming a counselor and spends several chapters discussing roadblocks that one may encounter as a counselor. I found myself feeling down as I read some chapters as he doesn't try to sugarcoat anything, yet the author would also point out the joys of this career path, reminding us why we do this. I would highly recommend this to those who are just starting out and recommend it to those who have been doing this for awhile, as it is a good reminder.

Justin says

This was originally required reading for a clinical class (the instructor assigned another book), but ended up being something I read for personal fun and learning. That said, *On Being a Therapist* is an honest and uncensored exploration of the profession. Kottler writes in an accessible and engaging style with plenty of personal anecdotes I could relate to in my own experience as both counselor and client. He begins by laying the foundation of how people get into the field and the basics of the therapeutic relationship. Then he explores personal and professional roles, how clients change their therapists, and the hardships of the profession. The following chapters cover dealing with failure, difficult clients, and boredom and burnout. The chapters covering the unsaid things about the profession and lies therapists tell were particularly enlightening and hilariously relatable. Finally the last two sections end on a more reassuring note and address self-care and creativity. Given the broad scope he covers, there are plenty of areas to revisit and consider as a professional depending on which topic may come up at a particular time. *On Being a Therapist* was an enjoyable and helpful read for anyone entering/working in the mental health field as well as those who are/have been clients to better understand their therapists.

Chris Hunt says

For anyone considering being a therapist this is a book I'd recommend. It provides insight into the mind of a therapist. For anyone else, however, it's not exactly thought-provoking. The author also tends to ramble on and on and while that makes it easier to read, it makes it less interesting. Overall, ho-hum.

Bea Foster says

I read this book out of the pure curiosity of how a therapist's mind works. Attempting also to gain insight and understanding to how a therapist could possibly be understanding and compassionate without having acceptance or tolerance of someone's actions. This is an intriguing skill to me!

Kottler's book *On Being a Therapist* provides insight into the mind of a therapist and tends to be focused on the negative aspects of the profession. Stressing the need for constant self-reflection and supervision.

This is the fourth edition of the book. The book was a bit repetitive and seemed to generalize Kottler's views on being a therapist, lacking in depth examples and explanations that could have created a more compelling read.

Two overbearing words come to mind when thinking about this book ~ cynical and narcissistic ~ therapists are human, struggling to maintain a professional identity.

Kathy says

I got this book assigned to me for class. I really enjoy it as a classroom assigned book but I wouldn't find myself reaching for it if I didn't have to read it. Interesting for assigned reading but not interesting enough to read recreationally. I teetered between whether I should give this book 2 or 3 stars but decided 3 would be more fair.

The book is more depressing and discouraging as opposed to encouraging and uplifting. It makes the psychotherapists job seem almost miserable and that you have to work hard to make it not miserable for yourself. However I did appreciate his honesty and appreciated him talking about the taboo subjects of therapy and talking about the real thoughts therapists think. For a client of therapy reading this book it could have negative effects. Because it lets you know sometimes your therapist says encouraging things that they don't fully believe etc, or tells you they have faith in you when they're unsure if they really do. In my opinion if a therapist says things they don't fully believe to the client then they aren't a good therapist for that particular client.

One part of the book kind of annoyed me. Kottler asked therapists to share stories of day dreams they had about clients, and one therapist didn't like a client because he was whiney, passive, monotone, always complained, negative, low self esteem and the therapist said that the client knew the therapist couldn't stand him but he was used to people not liking him so accepted this as normal. He said he would daydream of slapping the client while he was in the middle of his self pity and complaints. It seemed odd to me that the therapist was so annoyed at the low self esteem, self pity-ing client since this person seems like a perfect candidate for benefiting from therapy and don't a lot of people like this seek therapy? So I was surprised that this therapist hadn't been mentally and emotionally prepared for this kind of client. Kottler included this part probably because he regarded it as a common thing in therapy. I'm sure therapists do get annoyed by clients time to time but if it's at that level of disdain how would counter transference not occur? How would that not effect the quality of the therapists therapeutic interventions with the client? If someone disliked their client that much they should do the right thing and refer them out.

This book also reaffirms to me why I don't prefer to see male therapists. The book constantly mentions him or other therapists feeling sexual attraction for some of their female clients. It makes it seem like a huge and constant struggle for the male therapist. Again, I don't see how a therapist feeling a strong sexual attraction to their client wouldn't get in the way of the quality of the therapy. Basically if the therapist really hates their client, like in the previous paragraph, or if a therapist is very attracted to their client sexually, they should really refer them out imo.

Overall 3 stars for the honesty and speaking of things that are taboo for therapists to admit. 2 stars off for dwelling too much on the negatives and making therapy seem like a dreadful job.

Ghenadie Virtos says

An honest account from across the sofa. I liked the author's honesty about the troubles of the profession. It is always a personal treat to find out the ways in which other humans are humans. There is little news in the fact the therapists also struggle with the challenges of a permanent job - tediousness, boredom, distraction, questioning oneself, however, Kottler did a nice job going into details and being courageous about revealing some of the suspected secrets of the profession. It does help understand the therapy process better and it gains some sympathy for the therapist.

On the minus side, there were many points in which the author didn't go below the surface, got too often entangled in theoretical and abstract musings about the profession, to the point of falling into the trap of excessive romanticising. Some more case studies and stories would have been welcome.
