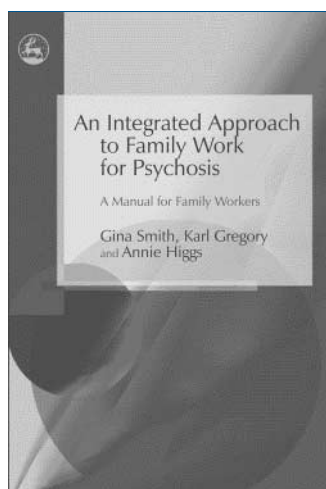


Book reviews

Edited by Sidney Crown, Femi Oyebode
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Two recently published books on family work are reviewed below, both providing guidance on working with families of those with serious mental health problems. Even though one is published in the USA and one in the UK, there are similarities, with both discussing the literature, techniques (such as the use of genograms), and what to do in family sessions. Both are primarily guidebooks dealing with the practicalities of delivering family work.



An Integrated Approach to Family Work for Psychosis: A Manual for Family Workers

By Gina Smith, Karl Gregory & Annie Higgs.
Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
2007. 208pp. £18.99 (pb).
ISBN 9781843103691

This book is written by experienced clinicians with a genuine passion, enthusiasm and commitment to working with families. It is clear that they have been attempting for years to implement a family approach to care. Their attitude to families is without fault – empathic, humble, respectful of their feelings, experiences, and strengths. It is confirmed by glowing testimonials from family members who have benefited from their help. Their book advocates a non-prescriptive, non-formulaic approach to family work that is individualised and flexible.

The book is divided into two sections: section one deals with the ‘what, why, who, when and where’ of family work; section two covers preparation, assessment, managing meetings with families, and how to promote recovery. Throughout, there is useful guidance on a range of practical issues, such as note-keeping, venues for family meetings and the importance of supervision.

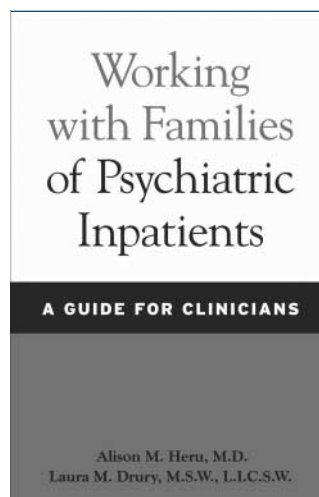
The authors describe a particular model of family work, based primarily on the approach developed by Julian Leff and colleagues. It is very much a mental illness model which regards co-working as essential (p. 84). However, not all psychoeducational family approaches comply with this model, and the strict adherence to it as proposed in the book is at odds with the overall flexibility otherwise advocated here. It would have been helpful if the authors had alerted the reader to different models of family work in psychosis, embracing those that marry systemic and family management models and describing how the various models differ.

The book is probably best used as an adjunct for people in training, rather than as a stand-alone manual. Some quite complex concepts, such as enmeshed or estranged relationships, rigid and diffuse boundaries etc., are discussed briefly, but it would have been helpful to have more detail on the actual content of sessions with families.

Although the book might seem repetitive, with text boxes, summaries and key points in each chapter, overall it is a useful practical manual for those delivering family work.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.107.039792



Working with Families of Psychiatric Inpatients: A Guide for Clinicians

By Alison M. Heru & Laura M. Drury.
The Johns Hopkins University Press.
2007. 192pp. US\$20.00 (pb).
ISBN 9780801885778

In the UK, family work continues to be seen as an intervention that is delivered mostly by community services and so it is excellent to read a book which addresses the important issue of providing family interventions within in-patient settings. The effects of mental health issues on the family and the benefits of working with both the service user and their family to aid the process of recovery are explained clearly and in a manner that will encourage and motivate clinicians to cooperate with families more closely.

The book is divided into five parts: part one outlines the knowledge, skills and attitude necessary to provide a family-focused approach within an in-patient setting, and the biopsychosocial model, exploring a biosocial assessment and treatment plan. Part two brings together research findings which influence our understanding of the role of family in mental health issues and treatment. Part three deals with mastering the skills a clinician needs to work successfully with the family, such as assessment, family meetings, multifamily psychoeducational groups and genograms. Part four considers the challenges in working with families both from the clinician's and the family's perspective. Part five addresses risk management and family-based services after discharge from hospital.

The authors give very practical guidance following the psychoeducational approach, with excellent case studies demonstrating the procedure and outcome. For instance, there is an example of an abbreviated family assessment carried out to help with time constraints, and practical advice on managing family meetings. Common mistakes made when working with families are also covered.

The book is aimed at medical students and contains information on the core competences required for their training, which relate well to family work. Still, it will also be extremely useful to any clinician from whatever profession working with service users and their families.