

*Helping Skills:**Facilitating exploration, insight, and action*

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This is a large and very comprehensive book addressing counselling and therapeutic skills. The intended market, according to the Preface is undergraduate and postgraduate students of programmes such as Psychology who will ultimately pursue careers in medicine, psychology, social work or other diverse professions which involve working with people on problems or issues. I consider, however, that there could be a wider audience for this book, including practicing social workers who wish to gain greater theoretical grounding and knowledge of techniques for their work with people who use their services. The preface cautions that the book is not intended to help readers diagnose psychiatric problems or work with people with serious mental health problems or emotional difficulties. It does, however, deal with skills for engaging with clients around a range of issues.

The book is written by three distinguished figures in the world of therapy and therapeutic literature and is based around Clara Hill's therapeutic model. This model is sometimes referred to as a stage model and one might consider mapping her three "stages" to the stages of Gerard Egan's problem solving model which are current scenario, desired scenario and way forward. Indeed, earlier editions of the book were based on a more staged model approach. However, in this edition Hill calls the three domains of her model goals rather than stages because she now prefers to envision helping as a more "fluid process" rather than a rigid and structured problem solving process, which progresses linearly. This approach has some value for professionals such as social workers and occupational therapists who may have quite long relationships with their clients in which there are a number of issues that take on greater or lesser importance across the duration of the therapeutic relationship.

Hill's three goals are those of the book's subtitle-exploration, insight and action. She sees exploration as the most important of the goals and something which is important throughout a therapeutic relationship.

Each of the goals has been underpinned by a particular theoretical tradition. Exploration is underpinned by person centred theories including those of Carl Rogers. The insight goal is underpinned by psychodynamic and interpersonal theories. The action component builds on cognitive behavioural approaches. This is a powerful approach which will be favoured by eclectic practitioners who see the value in these different theoretical perspectives but who want to utilise them in a structured coherent way rather than a random “pick and mix” approach. A focus on moment by moment interactions is a key feature of Hill’s approach which is particularly useful for students and newly qualified practitioners for whom the development of an ability to reflect IN action as well as reflect ON action is important.

The book is structured in a logical way which makes it easy for the reader to understand how each chapter fits into the overall model and the development of skills around it. The first section contains some introductory chapters providing an overview of the model and a chapter each on developing self-awareness as a helper, developing cultural competence and dealing with ethical issues. While the chapter on ethics is helpful in stimulating thoughts on ethical issues, readers who are registered members of different professions will have to refer to their own profession’s code of ethics as well as the policies and procedures of their agencies when dealing with ethical issues. The following three sections are based around one of the three goals of the Hill model and have four to five chapters each. Within the sections, each chapter explores an aspect of the goal to which that section relates. For example, the section on Exploration begins with a chapter overview of the exploration goals and the theory underpinning it, followed by chapters on skills for offering support, skills for exploring cognitions and skills for exploring feelings. The final chapter in each section considers how that goal can be integrated with the other two aspects of the model. Thus, the reader is taken on a journey where they learn the importance of each of the goals while simultaneously gaining an understanding of its theoretical underpinnings, practical skills for actualizing the goal, and how the different components of the model fit together and interact.

The final section of the text consists of a single chapter which deals with particular issues such as dealing with clients who are resistant to help and clients who express suicidal ideation.

The book can be used both by individual readers and lecturers in a

classroom situation. Case studies are employed to illustrate concepts, and the text is broken up with activities, some of which can be done by individuals to stimulate their reflections on the material and some of which are role play or group exercises for use with classroom groups. While the focus of the book is on work with individuals, I consider the book to also be of value for people in group work settings who want to better understand the psychology of human interactions and help their group members with developmental activities. The goals or stages of Hill's model can be visualised as developmental processes for groups or organisations even though this isn't explored within the book.

The book has useful insights throughout on dealing sensitively with diversity in working with people of different cultural backgrounds, a crucially important dimension sometimes missing or underdeveloped in books on counselling and therapy.

As is the case with large American student texts, this book is costly. However, I always tell my students that one comprehensive and detailed book is more helpful than four superficial texts, and a book like this is one that can be useful throughout one's career. Readers may be able to save money by buying an earlier edition, however, this edition benefits from the more fluid version of Hill's model and the additional insights of the two co-authors introduced in this version of the text. Overall, I consider this a worthwhile investment for students and working professionals who wish to improve their therapeutic interactions and learn a semi-structured model which can accommodate diverse psychological perspectives.

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