

how to start your own counseling practice

How to Start Your Own Counseling Practice: A Step-by-Step Guide to Building Your Private Practice

how to start your own counseling practice is a question that many mental health professionals ask themselves at some point in their careers. Whether you're a licensed counselor, therapist, or social worker, the idea of managing your own practice can be both exciting and daunting. The freedom to set your own schedule, choose your clients, and create a personalized therapeutic environment is incredibly rewarding, but it also comes with unique challenges. If you're wondering how to turn your clinical skills into a thriving private practice, this comprehensive guide will walk you through the essentials—from legal considerations and business setup to marketing strategies and client retention.

Understanding the Foundations Before Launching

Before diving into the nuts and bolts of starting a counseling practice, it's important to have a clear understanding of your professional and business goals. A private practice isn't just about counseling; it's also about running a small business.

Clarify Your Niche and Services

Counseling is a broad field with many specialties. Identifying your niche can help you target the right clients and distinguish your practice from others. Are you interested in working with children, couples, trauma survivors, or individuals struggling with anxiety? The more specific you can be, the better you can tailor your services and marketing efforts.

Consider also what types of therapy you'll offer—cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), psychodynamic therapy, family counseling, or online teletherapy sessions. Offering specialties that match your training and passion will not only attract clients but also keep your work fulfilling.

Check Licensing and Legal Requirements

One of the most crucial steps in how to start your own counseling practice is ensuring you meet all necessary licensing and regulatory requirements. These regulations vary by state or country, so it's essential to verify:

- Your current professional license status and any additional certifications needed.
- Business licenses required to operate a private counseling practice.

- HIPAA compliance and confidentiality laws if you're in the U.S., or equivalent privacy laws in your region.
- Malpractice insurance and liability protection.

Consulting with a healthcare attorney or professional licensing board can save you from costly mistakes down the road.

Setting Up Your Counseling Practice Infrastructure

Once you have your credentials and legalities in order, the next step is creating the physical and operational framework of your practice.

Choosing the Right Location

Location plays a vital role in attracting clients. Depending on your budget and target market, you might consider:

- Renting office space in a professional building.
- Sharing space with other therapists to reduce costs.
- Setting up a home office if your local regulations permit.
- Offering virtual counseling sessions to expand your reach.

Accessibility, privacy, and comfort are key factors. Clients should feel safe and welcomed in your environment.

Technology and Tools for Your Practice

Modern counseling practices rely heavily on technology for scheduling, billing, and client communication. Investing in the right tools can streamline your workflow and improve client experience. Some essential tools include:

- Practice management software (e.g., SimplePractice, TherapyNotes).
- Secure video conferencing platforms for telehealth (Zoom for Healthcare, Doxy.me).
- Online appointment booking systems.
- Electronic health records (EHR) compliant with privacy laws.
- Payment processing solutions for insurance claims and out-of-pocket fees.

Choosing user-friendly and secure technology builds trust and efficiency.

Financial Planning and Budgeting

Starting a counseling practice involves upfront and ongoing expenses. Creating a realistic budget helps you plan for:

- Office rent and utilities.
- Marketing and advertising.
- Professional memberships and continuing education.
- Insurance premiums and legal fees.
- Technology subscriptions and equipment.
- Miscellaneous office supplies.

Forecast your expected income based on client rates and anticipated caseload to ensure sustainability.

Marketing Your Counseling Practice Effectively

Attracting clients is often the most challenging part of how to start your own counseling practice. Developing a solid marketing strategy can help you build a steady client base.

Building Your Brand and Online Presence

Your brand is more than a logo; it's the message and feeling you convey to potential clients. Think about how you want your practice to be perceived—warm and empathetic, professional and clinical, or holistic and integrative.

Having a professional website is non-negotiable. It should include:

- Your qualifications and specialties.
- Services offered and session formats.
- Clear contact information and appointment scheduling.
- Blog posts or resources that demonstrate your expertise.
- Testimonials (with client consent) or success stories.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is key to helping people find your website when they search for counseling services in your area. Incorporate relevant keywords naturally throughout your site, such as "licensed therapist near me," "anxiety counseling services," or "online couples therapy."

Networking and Community Engagement

Word-of-mouth remains one of the most powerful marketing tools for private practices. Consider:

- Joining local therapist groups or professional associations.
- Collaborating with healthcare providers for referrals.
- Hosting workshops or support groups to increase visibility.
- Participating in community events or wellness fairs.

Building relationships with other professionals can lead to a steady stream of referrals and enhance your reputation.

Utilizing Social Media and Advertising

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn offer opportunities to connect with potential clients and share valuable content. Focus on providing helpful tips, mental health awareness posts, or answering common questions about therapy.

Paid advertising through Google Ads or social media can boost your reach, especially when targeting specific demographics or geographic areas.

Managing Client Relationships and Practice Growth

Starting your counseling practice is only the beginning. Retaining clients and growing your business require ongoing effort.

Providing Excellent Client Care

Your clients' experience will shape your practice's success. Effective communication, empathy, and professionalism are essential. Consider:

- Clear intake and consent forms.
- Transparent fee structures and cancellation policies.
- Regular feedback opportunities to improve services.
- Continuous professional development to enhance your skills.

Happy clients are more likely to refer others and leave positive reviews.

Handling Billing and Insurance

Navigating insurance reimbursement can be complex. Decide whether you will accept insurance or operate on a self-pay basis. Managing billing efficiently includes:

- Verifying client insurance coverage before sessions.
- Submitting claims accurately and promptly.
- Offering flexible payment options.
- Keeping detailed financial records for tax purposes.

Hiring a billing specialist or using software can reduce administrative burdens.

Scaling Your Practice Over Time

As your practice grows, you might want to:

- Hire associate therapists or administrative staff.
- Expand your services or specialties.
- Open additional office locations.
- Incorporate group therapy or workshops.

Developing a business plan with clear milestones helps you stay focused and organized as you scale.

Starting a counseling practice is a journey that blends clinical passion with entrepreneurial savvy. By thoughtfully addressing the practical, legal, and marketing aspects, you can create a fulfilling career that makes a meaningful difference in your clients' lives. Whether you're just beginning or looking to refine your existing practice, embracing these strategies will set you on the path to success.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the first steps to start my own counseling practice?

The first steps include obtaining the necessary licensure and certifications, developing a business plan, choosing a location or setting up a virtual practice, and understanding legal and insurance requirements.

How do I choose the right niche for my counseling practice?

Consider your professional strengths, interests, and the needs of your target population. Research market demand, competition, and potential client demographics to identify a niche that aligns with your expertise.

and is sustainable.

What legal considerations should I be aware of when starting a counseling practice?

You need to establish your business structure (e.g., LLC, sole proprietorship), obtain liability insurance, comply with HIPAA and confidentiality laws, create informed consent forms, and understand state regulations for counseling practices.

How can I effectively market my counseling practice to attract clients?

Develop a professional website, utilize social media, network with other healthcare professionals, participate in community events, and consider online directories and search engine optimization to increase visibility.

What are the essential tools and technology needed to run a counseling practice efficiently?

Essential tools include secure electronic health record (EHR) software, appointment scheduling systems, teletherapy platforms, billing and invoicing software, and reliable communication tools while ensuring client confidentiality.

How do I manage finances and insurance billing in a counseling practice?

Set up a business bank account, maintain accurate financial records, understand insurance reimbursement processes, consider hiring a medical billing specialist or using billing software, and establish clear payment policies for clients.

Additional Resources

[How to Start Your Own Counseling Practice: A Professional Guide](#)

how to start your own counseling practice is a question increasingly asked by mental health professionals seeking autonomy and the ability to tailor their therapeutic services to client needs. Establishing a private practice offers the opportunity to build a personalized approach to counseling, but it also demands careful planning, compliance with regulations, and business acumen. Navigating this process requires a blend of clinical expertise and entrepreneurial skills, as well as a deep understanding of the mental health landscape.

The journey from licensed counselor to independent practitioner involves multiple facets: securing credentials, understanding licensure requirements, setting up an operational framework, marketing your services, and managing the financial aspects of running a practice. This article explores these components in depth, providing a roadmap for counselors who aspire to launch their own practice successfully.

Understanding the Foundation: Credentials and Licensing

Before diving into the practicalities of establishing a private counseling practice, it is crucial to ensure that all necessary credentials and licenses are in place. The foundation of a credible counseling practice lies in proper certification and adherence to state regulations.

Licensure Requirements and Professional Credentials

Different states and countries have varying requirements for licensing mental health professionals. Typically, licensed professional counselors (LPCs), licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs), licensed marriage and family therapists (LMFTs), and psychologists must meet specific educational standards, supervised clinical hours, and pass licensing examinations. Confirming these requirements early on can prevent legal issues and provide clarity on the scope of practice permitted.

In addition to licensure, certifications in specialized therapy methods (e.g., cognitive-behavioral therapy, trauma-informed care) can enhance the quality of services and attract clients seeking specific support. Maintaining Continuing Education Units (CEUs) is also essential to keep licensure active and stay updated on best practices.

Legal Structures and Business Registration

Choosing the appropriate business structure—whether sole proprietorship, limited liability company (LLC), or corporation—affects taxes, liability, and administrative responsibilities. Many counselors prefer forming an LLC to protect personal assets while benefiting from pass-through taxation.

Registering the business with local and state authorities, obtaining an Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the IRS, and applying for any necessary permits or zoning clearances are indispensable steps. Additionally, counseling practices often require professional liability insurance to safeguard against malpractice claims, which is a critical consideration before accepting clients.

Setting Up Your Practice: Location, Technology, and Services

Once the legal and credentialing groundwork is solidified, the focus shifts to operational logistics. The physical and technological infrastructure of a counseling practice can significantly influence client experience and practice efficiency.

Choosing the Right Location

Selecting a location for your counseling practice involves balancing accessibility, privacy, and cost. Many new counselors start with shared office spaces or renting therapy rooms on a part-time basis to minimize overhead. These arrangements can also foster professional networking opportunities.

For those opting for a dedicated office, considerations include proximity to public transportation, parking availability, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to accommodate clients with disabilities. A welcoming, confidential, and comfortable environment is paramount for effective therapy sessions.

Incorporating Telehealth Services

The integration of telehealth platforms has become increasingly vital, especially post-pandemic, offering flexibility and expanded reach. Implementing secure, HIPAA-compliant video conferencing tools allows therapists to serve clients beyond geographic constraints and caters to individuals preferring remote sessions.

Selecting software that manages scheduling, billing, and electronic health records (EHR) can streamline administrative tasks. Platforms such as SimplePractice, TheraNest, or TherapyNotes are popular choices among private practitioners, providing integrated solutions tailored to mental health services.

Defining Your Counseling Services and Specializations

Identifying your niche helps differentiate your practice in a competitive market. Whether focusing on adolescent therapy, couples counseling, trauma recovery, or substance abuse, clearly articulating your specialties can attract targeted client populations.

Developing a service menu that outlines session types, lengths, and fees contributes to transparency and professionalism. Offering sliding scale fees or group therapy options might also broaden accessibility and diversify income streams.

Marketing and Client Acquisition Strategies

Building a counseling practice extends beyond clinical proficiency; it involves strategic marketing to establish visibility and trust within the community.

Building a Professional Online Presence

An informative, user-friendly website is the cornerstone of modern marketing. It should include your credentials, services offered, client testimonials, and contact information. Search engine optimization (SEO) techniques—such as incorporating keywords like “how to start your own counseling practice,” “licensed counselor near me,” and “mental health therapy services”—can improve search rankings and attract organic traffic.

Active social media profiles on platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram enable engagement with potential clients and referral sources. Sharing educational content related to mental health topics positions you as a knowledgeable resource.

Networking and Referral Systems

Establishing relationships with other healthcare providers, schools, community organizations, and local businesses can generate consistent referrals. Participating in professional associations and local events aids in building credibility and expanding your professional network.

Some practitioners also collaborate with Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or insurance panels to access a broader client base. While insurance participation can introduce administrative complexities and reduced fees, it remains a significant avenue for client acquisition.

Financial Management and Operational Efficiency

Sound financial practices are crucial to sustaining a counseling practice and enabling growth.

Budgeting and Expense Management

Start-up costs can include office rent, furnishing, technology, licensing fees, insurance, and marketing expenses. Creating a detailed budget helps anticipate cash flow needs and avoid unforeseen financial strain.

Tracking income and expenditures through accounting software tailored for small businesses ensures accurate financial records, aids in tax preparation, and informs strategic decisions.

Client Billing and Insurance Reimbursement

Deciding on fee structures—hourly rates, packages, or sliding scales—should reflect market standards and personal financial goals. For those accepting insurance, verifying provider status and understanding reimbursement processes is essential.

Implementing clear policies regarding cancellations, payment methods, and confidentiality builds trust and reduces administrative friction.

Time Management and Record-Keeping

Balancing clinical work with administrative duties can be challenging. Utilizing practice management software can automate scheduling, reminders, and documentation, freeing time to focus on client care.

Maintaining thorough, confidential records complies with ethical standards and protects both client and practitioner.

The path to establishing a private counseling practice is multifaceted, blending clinical competence with entrepreneurial insight. While challenges such as regulatory compliance, marketing, and financial management require attention, the rewards of creating a personalized therapeutic environment and fostering meaningful client relationships are substantial. Embracing both the art of counseling and the science of business can pave the way for a thriving, impactful practice.

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how to start your own counseling practice: Starting a Successful Practice in Clinical Psychology and Counseling Owen J. Bargreen, 2013-10-08 Clinical psychology is a quickly growing profession, yet it is a challenging one: the preparation is arduous, the training is highly selective, and the results - an established and financially successful practice - are not easy to achieve. This book explains how to prepare for and surmount all of the hurdles presented to those who hope to eventually develop a lucrative and rewarding practice in clinical psychology. It is the first of its kind to focus primarily on financial success, though it does also look at the personal stresses and rewards of the profession. The author provides tips from his own experience and from other financially successful private practice psychologists and offers business techniques and pointers that are not explained in training programs. Undergraduate students contemplating a

career in psychology will find advice on preparing for the GRE, applying to graduate schools, and getting involved in research and clinical work. For graduate students, an overview of a graduate clinical psychology program, preparing and completing a dissertation, and gaining experience in psychological testing are provided. Chapters then focus on how to build and manage a private practice, the best ways to manage personal and business finances, and how to practice good self-care. Additionally, the book includes a chapter by an expert on student-loan repayment that examines how to best work through the process of paying back student loans while building a practice.

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how to start your own counseling practice: Introduction to Clinical Mental Health Counseling Joshua C. Watson, Michael K. Schmit, 2019-01-23 Introduction to Clinical Mental Health Counseling presents a broad overview of the field of clinical mental health and provides students with the knowledge and skills to successfully put theory into practice in real-world settings. Drawing from their experience as clinicians, authors Joshua C. Watson and Michael K. Schmit cover the foundations of clinical mental health counseling along with current issues, trends, and population-specific considerations. The text introduces students to emerging paradigms in the field such as mindfulness, behavioral medicine, neuroscience, recovery-oriented care, provider care, person-centered treatment planning, and holistic wellness, while emphasizing the importance of selecting evidence-based practices appropriate for specific clients, issues, and settings. Aligned with 2016 CACREP Standards and offering practical activities and case examples, the text will prepare future counselors for the realities of clinical practice.

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with helpful guidelines and proven strategies for success in every aspect of NP practice, including certification and licensure, finding and negotiating a practice opportunity, and developing community and professional partnerships. Guidelines for completing the necessary requirements for certification and licensure Tips for finding and negotiating a practice opportunity Strategies for using available technology and tools, such as the internet and PDAs, to create a successful clinical practice environment Ideas for developing a community partnership by creating successful professional and clinical contacts in the community Practical advice on how best to market oneself and interview with potential employers Key information on establishing systems in practice, using tools to enhance clinical judgment, and other important responsibilities related to clinical practice A wealth of real-world examples, including resumes, collaborative agreements, contracts, business plans, billing and coding, and productivity flowcharts, provide essential resources for a successful practice

how to start your own counseling practice: *Beginning Your Counseling Career* Mary Olufunmilayo Adekun, 2020-02-21 *Beginning Your Counseling Career* provides a comprehensive overview of the counseling profession and equips students with the clinical and administrative skills they need to progress in the field. Helpfully organized into five sections, the text addresses basic career considerations and preparatory aspects of the profession, as well as a range of topics to help students broaden their focus on professional development. Chapters cover areas including online masters and doctoral programs, developing a counseling identity, mentoring students for private practice, supporting minority students in counseling programs, considerations for international students, special education legislation, and more. Suitable for students taking preliminary courses in counseling as well as practicum and internship classes, *Beginning Your Counseling Career* offers a detailed and up-to-date framework for aspiring professional counselors at both masters and doctoral levels.

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how to start your own counseling practice: Genetic Counseling Practice Bonnie S. LeRoy, Patricia M. Veach, Dianne M. Bartels, PhD, 2011-09-20 The first advanced-level genetics counseling skills resource As genetic medicine and testing continue to expand, so the role of the genetic counselor is transforming and evolving. *Genetic Counseling Practice: Advanced Concepts and Skills* is the first text to address ways that genetic counselors can deepen their skills to meet expanding practice demands. This timely resource not only helps readers further develop their abilities to gather relevant data and interpret it for patients, it also aids them in surpassing their usual role by truly understanding patient situations, incorporating patient values into clinical practice, providing in-depth support, and facilitating thoroughly informed, autonomous decisions. Edited by an expert cross-disciplinary team consisting of a genetic counseling program director, a licensed psychologist, and a nurse/bioethicist/family social scientist, this authoritative reference provides specific and detailed instruction in addressing psychosocial aspects of genetic counseling practice and professional development and training issues of genetic counselors. Provides a process view of

genetic counselor service provision; i.e., skills that promote desired genetic counseling outcomes are emphasized (such as relationship skills, patient characteristics, client behaviors, and extra-clinical skills) Includes experiential activities in every chapter to help readers apply concepts and skills Draws on the experience of widely recognized experts in genetic counseling theory, practice, and research, who serve as chapter authors Features numerous specific, real-life examples from clinical practice Genetic Counseling Practice addresses issues relevant to practicing genetic counselors as well as students of genetic counseling programs. In addition, oncology nurses, social workers, and psychologists working with genetic counseling patients and families; medical geneticists and physicians training in the field; and physician assistants will also benefit from this resource.

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how to start your own counseling practice: DVD Counseling and Psychotherapy Theories in Context and Practice John Sommers-Flanagan, Rita Sommers-Flanagan, 2004-04-26 Learn the various counseling theories through authentic examples led by actual practitioners working with real clients This comprehensive two-DVD set promotes student learning by illustrating each of the counseling theories covered in the textbook Counseling and Psychotherapy Theories in Context and Practice, Second Edition by John and Rita Sommers-Flanagan. However, the DVDs can be used in conjunction with this text or as a stand-alone teaching tool in any course covering psychotherapy theories and techniques. Unique in its presentation of real clinicians from a variety of work settings—including school and college counselors—working with actual clients, the DVDs: Feature practitioners and clients who represent ethnic, gender, age, and religious diversity Model how to develop a positive therapeutic relationship from any theoretical perspective Help students not only understand the differences between theories, but also the difference between theory and technique Offer commentary by the authors on how the counselor in the session made decisions from a theoretical perspective as well as why a particular counseling theory was appropriate for the client's situation Exploring Psychoanalytic, Adlerian, Existential, Person-Centered, Gestalt, Behavioral, Cognitive-Behavioral, Reality, Feminist, Solution-Focused, and Family Systems theories, these two DVDs shed light on these theories in real practice with clients.

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grounded in the belief that grief counseling is distinct from other therapeutic issues because it is an adaptive response rather than a form of pathology. It describes the unique aspects of grief as a normal response to losses both death and non-death related, and views the goal of counseling bereaved individuals as one of facilitating the unfolding of the healthy and adaptive aspects of the process as it manifests itself within each client. The book introduces various theories of bereavement and examines different therapeutic modalities that can be used in the context of grief and loss. Specific counseling practices that facilitate successful interventions are discussed, particularly that of presence, considered by the authors to be the primary therapeutic stance when working with bereaved individuals. The text also addresses grief counseling with special populations, ethical issues, and self-care concerns for counselors. Case studies, discussion and reflection questions, and suggested additional resources are included in each chapter. New to the Second Edition: New insights on complicated grief, DSM categorizations of grief, resilience, and compassion-based approaches to death, loss, and grief A completely new chapter on the social context of loss, including social messaging, grieving rules, and workplace policies New case scenarios Addresses the unique aspects of grief after suicide and homicide Distinguishes grief/complicated grief from depression and trauma New information on the role and use of grief support groups New information on the use of social media and privacy issues Newly developed models of compassion-based response for counselors Application of current neuroscience research to grief counseling Use of technology and online counseling Key Features: Provides research-supported, practical guidance for grief counseling and support Regards grief therapy as a unique form of counseling based on grief as an adaptive response rather than as a form of pathology Written by two internationally recognized leaders in the field Focuses on the importance of presence as the most important therapeutic foundation for working with bereaved individuals Includes questions for reflection and glossary of terms

how to start your own counseling practice: It's Time for a Revolution Jessica Rothmeyer, Ph.D., 2021-03-22 It's Time for a Revolution takes an in-depth look at modern-day thinking and worldly teaching that is keeping the general population sick, oppressed, and without hope. The pressure and constant buzz of mainstream media has led to the rejection of most things Godly or biblical. Never has the path to truth been so twisted and camouflaged. This book will address common areas of deception that have led to the dysfunction and disease we see in the world today. Biblical principles that will be addressed: why God/Heaven is such a mystery, how to find radical freedom from plaguing mental and emotional issues, and discovering the truth about diet, money and physical healing. Through twenty years of research and client interactions, Dr. Jessica Rothmeyer has discovered the keys to healing and freedom, and it all begins by having a Kingdom mind-set. Taking biblical truths from God's Word and teaching them to her clients, helped to rewire their minds and hearts to align with God's; which led to incredible and miraculous healings. It is through writing this book that these revelations would spread to the masses, bringing supernatural freedom to people across the world, those who are living in fear, confusion, and poor health due to embracing the false teachings and empty promises made by academics, politicians, health care providers, and science. Let us return to having a Godly thought-life. Choosing to love others as Jesus loves us. And to be ever-vigilant to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, as the new mind-set, will change people's lives like never before. The human race has been duped and suffering for long enough! It's time for a revolution.

how to start your own counseling practice: The Art of Integrative Counseling Gerald Corey, 2018-08-08 Useful as a supplemental text in advanced theories and practicum courses, this fourth edition discusses the key concepts and techniques from many contemporary theories and how to develop an integrative approach to the counseling process to better meet individual client needs. Dr. Corey introduces the techniques that he draws from in his own integrative approach to counseling using a wide variety of case examples with diverse clients. Topics covered include assessing presenting issues; developing a productive working alliance; establishing therapeutic goals; understanding and addressing diversity; working with resistant clients; using evidence-based

practice in cognitive, emotive, and behavioral work with clients; dealing with transference and countertransference; and incorporating trends in integrative therapies. To encourage active learning, reflective exercises throughout the text provide readers with opportunities to put themselves in the role of therapist and client. No one knows more about theory-based counseling than Gerald Corey, who has spent the past 50+ years helping us to gain real insight into multiple models. In this book, Corey takes readers from forming a working alliance with clients through the processes for setting and achieving goals. His skill at and understanding of the termination processes is worth the entire book. Not only will *The Art of Integrative Counseling* be the core text for counseling process and skills courses, it will provide the foundation for effective, truly integrated counseling throughout one's career. —James Robert Bitter, EdD, East Tennessee State University

Gerald Corey's fourth edition of *The Art of Integrative Counseling* provides important concepts to consider when developing an integrative approach to working with clients. For beginning counselors, it demonstrates how one can be integrative whether one is behaviorally, cognitively, or affectively oriented. For more advanced counselors, it reminds them of the wealth of information that all theories offer and how techniques or theories can be synthesized into a more effective approach. Whether you are a new counselor trying to figure out how to integrate the many theories you learned about, or a seasoned professional seeking new ways of working with clients, this book has something for you. —Edward Neukrug, EdD, Old Dominion University

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