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## Book review: Handbook of evidence-based practices for emotional and behavioral disorders: applications in schools

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## **Book Review for The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health**

### **Handbook of Evidence-Based Practices for Emotional and Behavioural Disorders: Applications in Schools.**

H. Walker & F. Gresham (Eds.),  
New York;London: The Guildford Press.

The population under discussion is that broad group of children and young people (about 20%) experiencing emotional and behavioural challenges which affect their ability to get on successfully at school. The handbook is aimed at practitioners tasked with designing and implementing support for these pupils. Its context is the US education system and legislative framework.

The book's 32 somewhat disparate chapters (622 pages), written by subject experts, are organised into six sections: Foundations; Screening, Performance and Assessment; Interventions targeting specific disorders and settings; Generic Intervention Approaches; Early Intervention; and Research Methods. They provide broad coverage of a complex field, with topics including medication versus behavioural intervention, deviant peer contagion in group interventions, bullying, and transition out of school.

Many aspects of, and influences on, the way individuals interact with people, environments and materials are covered, and the overall theoretical framework is aligned with ecological and social learning models of behaviour. Many chapters advocate a holistic or multi-modal intervention approach, providing comprehensive services in schools, families and communities as well as enhancing individual skills. Several contributions discuss a public health model of tiers of intervention (promotion, prevention, intervention) starting with the integration of socio-emotional skills teaching into the curriculum.

The theme of basing practice on evidence runs through the book. James Kauffman has provided the prologue and epilogue and addresses the continued widespread resistance to the application of the scientific method to emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD). However the contributions make the difficulties clear. Even where randomised controlled trials (RCTs) exist, evidence can be contradictory or lack sufficient follow-up or contextual relevance. Some chapters review all the evidence on their topic, including reviews of longitudinal studies and qualitative research, while others argue the theoretical case for the likely effectiveness of an intervention. Some individual interventions are presented with detailed guidance and practice examples. Fidelity/integrity of implementation recurs as a key concern, with doubts over whether interventions can be implemented in a faithful and sustainable way in schools. There is recognition of the role of local practical experience alongside scientific data, and 'flexibility within fidelity'.

Much research is presented on the poor outcomes for children and young people with EBD if their difficulties are not addressed. A case is made for more interdisciplinary approaches, particularly integrating psychiatric and educational interests and targeting academic and behavioural outcomes together. The link between EBD and poor academic outcomes could, it is argued, help make the case for more funding and attention from school decision-makers. This volume describes the current evidence base for addressing EBD in schools. Although nearly all the research referred to is from the US, there is much of relevance for international readers.

Madeleine Stevens 6<sup>th</sup> February 2014