

These Books Will Change Your Life

Saying a book will change your life is a large claim but self help books have always made bold claims offering to make you happier, richer, more confident, more successful, or all of the above. The books on my list won't necessarily make you happier, richer, or more successful but they may make you look at the world, and yourself a little differently and may even set you off on a new trajectory. I've worked in the book industry for 20 years and have retrained and been working as a psychotherapist for the last 5 years. Putting together this list of books is in a way an attempt to bring together the two sides of my life, my book life and my therapy life. My first job back in 1993 was curating the self-help section in a Manchester branch of Dillons. I can still remember the mixture of alarm and unease with which I viewed my new purview. Like all newbie booksellers, all I wanted was to look after literary fiction, so self-help was distinctly uncool. What struck me on longer acquaintance with my new department was that there were real gems in there amongst the shrill Barnum and Bailey false promises. Navigating your way through to those gems is never easy and that's where good booksellers really help. I've put together this selection of books with Foyles and you'll find them either online at their website, www.foyles.co.uk or in the estimable psychology department of their Charing Cross Road store.

By the time I retrained as a psychotherapist a few years ago, I'd finally gotten my wish and worked as both a fiction bookseller for Hatchards, Piccadilly and latterly as a publisher's rep selling a big commercial fiction list. Retraining provided me with my second wave of engagement with psychology books, and though it was challenging at times I loved journeying through the new terrain of competing psychological models from the bedrock of psychoanalysis, through the existential rebels, the logical remedies of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, the calm relief of mindfulness and all points in between. What really struck me was that while much of the reading was highly academic, there were many books that were accessible to everyone, and the new perspectives they offered shouldn't be restricted to therapists and trainee therapists. I even came across some of my old friends from the Dillons' self-help section. What I've tried to do with this selection of books is to find a middle ground between the kinds of books you'd be introduced to in a foundation psychology or psychotherapy course, with the best of the self-help sections I've repeatedly maligned. January is the perfect time to dive in to something new, indeed it's the boom time of year for the self-help sections of our bookshops, many new books are published and bookshops highlight them as part of 'New Year, New You' promotions. So if you're feeling a twinge of post-Christmas ennui, are feeling a bit anxious or low, or perhaps it just seems that things have become a bit stuck in your life, maybe now is the time to open up a book and discover a new perspective. Many of these books have changed my life, or changed the way I see the world and myself. If you like them, or if you don't I'd love you to send me an email – meirion.todd@gmail.com – a tweet – @meiriontodd – or visit my website – www.meiriontodd.co.uk – letting me know your own experience of reading them. I'd also like to know which books have changed your life, what have I missed, which books should I really have included. And if you've already read any of the selections I've included a further reading title for each book. Happy reading!

Dryden's Handbook of Individual Therapy by Windy Dryden

9781412922388 Sage £31.99

FR: The Therapeutic Relationship by Petruska Clarkson

9781861563811 Wiley £33.99

The bible of personal therapy in the UK and a great place to start for anyone who'd like to know more about the many different flavours of therapy out there. Each different branch of therapy is represented by a leading therapist in the field, and if you've ever wanted to tell your Freudian from your Jungian, your CBT from your REBT or were concerned as to just what Gestalt therapy really entails, then this is the book for you.



Everyday Mysteries by Emmy van Deurzen

9780415376433 Routledge £25.99

FR: Paradox and Passion by Emmy van Deurzen

9780471973904 Wiley £36.99

The Existential therapists rebelled against the prevailing orthodoxies of psychoanalysis and medicine which they believed turned distress into disease and robbed us of discovering the meaning of our experiences. Emmy van Deurzen is the queen of British Existential therapy and *Everyday Mysteries* is her best book, a challenging and rewarding voyage through the practical wisdom of philosophy. If you enjoy the book, check out Van Deurzen's wonderful and eccentric training institute the NSPC (New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling) in North London which runs many short courses as well as Psychotherapy and Counselling trainings.



The Interpreted World by Ernesto Spinelli

9781412903059 Sage £25.99

FR: Heidegger and the Roots of Existential Therapy

9780826455093 Continuum £17.99

Phenomenology, deriving from the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl, is one of *the* buzz words in contemporary thought and psychology. Though it can appear abstruse, it's really just an attempt to turn off the meaning-making, doing mind and experience the world afresh, and has parallels with the Buddhist practice of mindfulness. Ernesto Spinelli is one of the key UK Existential Psychotherapists and this is a fluid and readable introduction to phenomenology.



Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl

9781844132393 Rider £7.99

FR: Staring at the Sun by Irvin Yalom

9780749928780 Piatkus £8.99

Renowned Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl was a contemporary of Freud, Reich and Adler in pre-war Vienna, he survived the death camps and went on to found Logotherapy, a form of existential therapy that argued that meaning was key in human life. *Man's Search for Meaning* is Frankl's classic memoir of survival and transcendence, what he takes from Auschwitz is that 'he who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how'.



Love's Executioner by Irvin Yalom

9780140128468 Penguin £9.99

FR: The Man With the Beautiful Voice by Lillian Rubin

9780749941932 Piatkus £8.99

Irvin Yalom is perhaps the most famous living psychiatrist and psychotherapist, the author of both academic works and novels, Yalom is best loved for his humane collections of case studies, of which *Love's Executioner* is the first and best known, as striking for his warts and all presentation of his own flaws as a therapist as for the vivid pen portraits of his clients.



Lectures from the Tavistock by Neville Symington

9780946960309 Free Association Books £19.95

FR: Revolution in Mind by George Makari

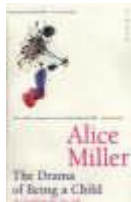
9780715639627 Duckworth £12

The triumph of the Nazis in the early years of World War 2 saw the flight of psychoanalysis from central Europe to Britain and America. Freud's arrival in London in 1938 led to Hampstead becoming a key centre and in the middle years of this century a new and very British form of psychoanalysis developed which focussed less on drives, sex and death and more on our fundamental relationships. Object Relations, as the British School of psychoanalysis became known, featured key players such as Donald Winnicott and Wilfred Bion and led to John Bowlby's Attachment Theory. If you've ever wanted to understand psychoanalysis, this is the book for you.



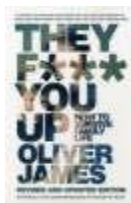
The Drama of Being a Child by Alice Miller
9781860491016 Virago £8.99
FR: Dibs: In Search of Self by Virginia Axline
9780140134599 Penguin £9.99

Alice Miller took the developments in psychoanalysis towards relationship and made of it a startling polemic. A forceful defender of the rights of the child against parental projections and desires, Miller takes up arms against what she terms *Poisonous Pedagogy*, a way of schooling and educating our children that she believes does them terrible harm. Miller's ideas alas are as timely now as they were when this book was first published. Take a deep breath and dive in, it's one of those books that can change how you see the world.



They Fuck You Up by Oliver James
9780747584780 Bloomsbury £8.99
FR: How Not to Fuck Them Up by Oliver James £8.99
9780091923938 Vermillion £8.99

Another psychoanalytically trained polemicist, Oliver James, author of *Affluenza* and *Britain on the Couch*, offers in *They Fuck You Up* an exhilarating tour through psychoanalysis and attachment theory. This is another book that can change how you see the world as James gets you thinking about how your childhood experiences have shaped how you see the world and others, and argues that these ways of relating are always open to the possibility of change.



The Velvet Rage by Alan Downs

9780738210612 Da Capo Press £9.99

FR: Mr Right Is Out There by Kenneth George

9781555835064 Alyson £9.99

The *Velvet Rage* is the book that gay men everywhere are talking about and sometimes arguing about. U.S. therapist Alan Downs looks at how childhood shame can hamper the authentic development of gay men, and how deprived of the usual rituals and shared life events this can hamper their path adulthood. Though Downs' book can be a little one-size-fits-all (not all gay men go through a 'fabulous' stage) and his examples can be a little starry, his basic theory is sound. If the book strikes a chord check out the personal development workshops run in its wake in London by the Quest - www.thequestawaitsyou.com.



Counselling For Toads by Robert de Board

9780415174299 Routledge £15.99

FR: I'm Okay, You're Okay by Thomas Harris

9780099557555 Arrow £7.99

Transactional Analysis is a form of psychotherapy that has simple yet persuasive basic model – as a result of childhood pain we spend much of our lives either lost in our child, fearful, needy, manipulative or sad, or we lose ourselves in parent mode, seeking to dominate others and puff ourselves up with ersatz importance. What is much harder is to stay in adult mode, and to treat others with similar complexity. De Board's book is a funny and smart take on TA, that employs characters from Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*, and follows Toad through crisis, therapy and beyond. Brilliantly done.



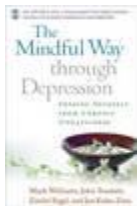
The Mindful Way Through Depression by Mark Williams et al

9781593851286 Guildford Press £15.99

FR: Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat Zinn

9780749915858 Piatkus £22

One of the key developments in Psychotherapy in recent years has been the influence of Buddhist ideas of *mindfulness* and *meditation* on the treatment of anxiety and depression. From the pioneering work done by Jon Kabat Zinn who developed his Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course in the U.S. initially as a way of helping those suffering from cancer better manage their conditions, mindfulness (experiencing what we are doing in the moment rather than leaping ahead and becoming lost in our thoughts) and meditation (sitting and just being with the present moment through following the breath) are increasingly being used to help with all kinds of psychological dis-ease. *The Mindful Way Through Depression* is a clear and easy to follow introduction to the improvements mindfulness and meditation can bring to our mental health.



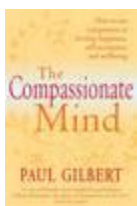
Compassionate Mind by Paul Gilbert

9781849010986 Constable £9.99

FR: Mindful Path to Self Compassion by Christopher Germer

9781593859756 Guildford Press £11.99

Compassion is the third key technique of Buddhist practice alongside mindfulness and meditation, and as many Buddhist teachers have noted, one that's badly needed in the West where so many of us have a highly-developed inner-critic. The key difference in Eastern approaches to compassion is one of practicality - Buddhism sees compassion as a discipline that can be taught and practised. Through simple exercises you can become more centred and more compassionate to yourself and others. Paul Gilbert is one of the most senior CBT therapists in the UK and in this easy to follow and engagingly written book, shows how focussing on compassion can bring real benefits to you and those around you.



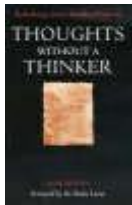
Thoughts Without a Thinker by Mark Epstein

9780465020225 Basic Books £8.99

FR: The Wise Heart by Jack Kornfield

9781846041259 Rider £13.99

Mark Epstein is a New York Psychoanalyst but in this book he argues that therapy and meditation go hand in hand: the one can't exist without the other, they are parallel and mutually beneficial journeys. Epstein's book entwines the wisdom of Buddhism with that of British Psychoanalysts such as Bion and Winnicott who sought both to explore the intricacies of relationship while acknowledging the sometimes unknowable and mysterious nature of being. The key in both journeys is the slow and painstaking task of learning to observe our experience and become more present to our way of being in the world.



Miracle of Mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh

9780712647878 Rider £9.99

FR: True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart by Thich Nhat Hanh

9781590304044 Shambhala Publications £6.99

While the other books on mindfulness I've selected are written by Western Psychologists, Thich Nhat Hanh is an eminent Buddhist monk and teacher. This luminously written short book was originally offered as a guide for volunteers working for peace in the Vietnam War, but is as relevant today as a guide to help us to stay, however briefly, in the moment. I love Thich Nhat Hanh's books, he shares with the best Buddhist writers a beautiful simplicity along with a humorous ear for the pithy epigram: 'washing the dishes to wash the dishes,' 'everything can be a rite,' and my favourite, 'don't just do something, sit there!'



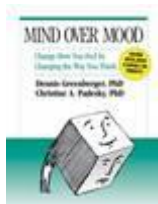
Mind Over Mood by Christine Padesky

9780898621280 Guildford Press £17.99

FR: The Happiness Trap by Russ Harris

9781845298258 Robinson £9.99

CBT, or cognitive behavioural therapy is the therapy of the moment, every client seems to ask 'do you do CBT?' and the government in its IAPT programme is favouring CBT over all over forms of talking therapy in a way that is dismaying many therapists. While CBT isn't the holy grail of therapies and is unsuited to those clients looking for a more explorative and relation-focussed approach to therapy, if you want a practical way of understanding and changing problematic thoughts, behaviours and self-beliefs, CBT can be a beautifully simple and effective way of making life less painful. Christine Padesky is one of the most eminent CBT therapists working today and if you only buy one book on CBT then Mind Over Mood should be it.



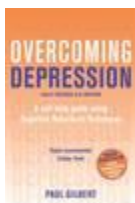
Overcoming Depression by Paul Gilbert

9781849010665 Robinson £12.99

FR: Overcoming Anxiety by Helen Kennerley

9781849010719 Robinson £10.99

Overcoming Depression is part of a great series from Robinson Books in which key Cognitive Behavioural therapists take a CBT approach to specific issues in a self-help format. Paul Gilbert's take on depression is particularly good but the series as a whole is very strong and has a lot more meat on the bone than the average self-help book.



The Antidote by Oliver Burkeman

9781847678669 Canongate £8.99

FR: Smile or Die by Barbara Ehrenreich

978-1847081735 Granta £8.99

In this brilliant book, Guardian Magazine columnist Oliver Burkeman argues that self-help books and the quest for happiness are actually making us miserable and echoing existential and Buddhist ideas argues that an acceptance of the unpalatable and oft avoided truths about life (that it's short, hard and often painful and disappointing) can actually make us much happier.



The Psychopath Test by Jon Ronson

9780330492270 Picador £9.99

FR: Them by Jon Ronson

9780330375467 Picador £8.99

I've been a fan of Ronson's writing since *Them*, his brilliant book about extremists which featured a memorable and oddly likeable cameo by the now notorious Abu Hamza. The Psychopath Test is even better, an odyssey through the mental health industry that is far more fun than a book about mental un-health has any right to be and leaves you with more questions than answers about everything from the labelling of mental illnesses, the benefits of feeding LSD to psychopaths, the dangers of the drug industry and the question of just how high you would score on the psychopath test (yes it exists).



How Proust Can Change Your Life by Alan de Botton

9780330354912 Picador £8.99

FR: The Consolations of Philosophy by Alan de Botton

9780140276619 Penguin £10.99

De Botton's brief and beguiling book on Proust is a celebration of just how much fiction can change your life. Taking Proust and his very long novel as his starting point, De Botton argues that a love of fiction can enoble and expand your world like nothing else. I share de Botton's enthusiasm for the transformative powers of fiction and having a novel on the go is one of the things that keeps me (relatively) sane, both an escape from my own worries and an imaginative journey into the worlds of others. My last three selections will be fiction, all books that in their different ways explore how we deal with those crisis points in our lives and begin to make sense of our often complex and seemingly insoluble personal and family histories.



This Book Will Save Your Life by A.M. Holmes

9781862079335 Granta £7.99

FR: When Nietzsche Wept by Irvin Yalom

9780062009302 Harper Perennial £14.99

AM Homes's books prior to This Book Will Save Your Life tended towards the dark and the macabre side of American life. This book came as a complete surprise and is both a life-enhancing and at times joyful account of a midlife crisis and a book that celebrates and humanizes Los Angeles, that most inhuman of cities. While it may not save your life it will make you cheer on formerly lost soul Richard Novak as he emerges from the LA canyons and begins to rediscover some kind of meaning. The wisdom of Homes' book is a kind of refutation of Sartre's 'hell is other people', instead Novak realises that life, while still imperfect and mystifying is made meaningful through our connections with others.



The Deptford Trilogy by Roberston Davies

9780241952627 Penguin £15.99

FR: Memories, Dreams, Reflections by Carl Jung

97800006540274 Fontana £9.99

Roberston Davies is my favourite writer and the Deptford Trilogy is his best book, an interlinked series of novels whose middle novel, *the Manticore* is a rich and exhilarating account of Jungian analysis. Peopled by brilliant and strange characters and characterised by a rejection of the standardizing commodification of the modern world, it's a book that seeks to return to a way of approaching the world that is mythic and archetypal in its language and meaning: *The Deptford Trilogy* provides an exhilarating antidote to a world from where 'the fear and dread and splendour of wonder have been banished'.



Freedom by Jonathan Franzen

9780007269761 Fourth Estate £8.99

FR: A Visit From the Goon Squad by Jennifer Egan

9781780330969 Corsair £7.99

Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* is such a strange book - at times I loved it, at others I hated it but by the time I finished it I thought it was brilliant and it has something to do with just how good Franzen is at character. While the characters in his novel may demonize one other he allows everyone in the novel their voice, and it's one of those books that while the style is heightened and sometimes close to parody, the psychological journey of each character is heart-breakingly real. By the end of it you care about characters that at times you may have loathed and as you follow their journey through the decades you begin to understand just how they came to be the, at times unhappy and dysfunctional, family they are.

