

Edited by Gillian Ruch, Danielle Turney and Adrian Ward

RELATIONSHIP- BASED

Getting to the
Heart of Practice

SOCIAL WORK

SECOND EDITION



Foreword by David Howe

‘The central message of this book should make it a “must-read” for all social workers, managers and those concerned with and about social work. As with all great ideas and concepts, the joy is that at their heart they are simple. What this book does beautifully is unpack the simple idea, exploring the key components of how social workers should place relationship-based social work at the centre of their practice. In a world too driven by technocratic responses, digital solutions and robotics, the one thing we can be sure of is that social workers will not be replaced by robots! This book explains why – you should read it.’

– *Dave Hill, CBE, Executive Director, Social Care and Education
at Essex County Council and past President of ADCS*

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GILLIAN RUCH, DANIELLE TURNEY and ADRIAN WARD

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Foreword

Of course it's never really gone away. It has always been there in social work, one way or another: the practitioner's relationship with her client, the service user. Whatever intentions you have, whichever technique you use, the medium in which matters are conducted is the relationship you have with the other, and the other has with you. The quality and character of these relationships therefore matter, they matter a great deal. Not surprisingly, outcomes have been shown to vary depending on the technique used or intervention chosen. However, more critically, outcomes have also been found to vary depending on the skill and quality of the relationship created by the practitioner as she engages with her client, no matter what technique or method she is using. In a sense then, all social work is relationship-based. There is no choice. In which case, it's vital that we do it well.

It was back in the late 1960s when I began my career as a social worker. I worked in a pre-Seebohm Children's Department. One of the books that helped me make sense of what I was doing, and perhaps also what I could and should do, was Margaret Ferard and Noel Hunnybun's 1962 book *The Caseworker's Use of Relationships* (with a foreword by John Bowlby, no less). Later that same year I came across Isca Salzberger-Wittenberg's 1970 book *Psycho-Analytic Insight and Relationships: A Kleinian Approach*. This gave my enthusiasm for understanding the way we relate to clients a further boost. Even though over the years the idea of relationship-based social work was destined to go in and out of fashion, I never lost faith in its fundamental importance. Like many of my colleagues, the decades saw me flirt with all manner of ideas and theories, fashions and fads, but wherever the ideological winds were blowing me, I tried to ground whatever I was thinking or doing, researching or writing, on the bedrock of the worker–client relationship. I worried that if social work could no

longer see that relationship-based practices were its core strength, then it was in danger of losing its humanity and with that its right to exist in any meaningful way.

The relationship between one human being and another is a complicated, tricky place. There is both confusion and delight as my thoughts, feelings and behaviours affect, and are affected by, your thoughts, feelings and behaviours. This is particularly the case when feelings are running high during moments of anxiety, fear, anger, love, shame, sadness. And social work, of course, is a place where feelings, almost by definition, routinely run high.

The idea of relationship-based social work is therefore both simple and complex. Simple in the sense that it is unavoidable. We all know about relationships because that is the everyday world, personally and professionally, in which we live and have our being. But as we've seen, it's also a complex place where there is endless scope for misunderstanding and confusion, connection and collaboration, anger and disappointment, joy and belonging, possibility and hope.

To help us understand and navigate this world, at least in the context of social work, Gillian Ruch, Danielle Turney and Adrian Ward have brought together a number of leading experts to write about relationship-based practice. Packed into these pages are so many good ideas, useful explanations and helpful practices that you will finish the book not only humbler and wiser but also feeling more convinced and determined.

There is a natural logic to the book as each chapter deals with one of the key aspects of doing relationship-based social work. The compilation begins by making the case for relationship-based practices in which there is a need to help the client achieve a balance between their internal and external needs. At times of upset and arousal we seek to regulate our emotions and have them managed and contained. If we can achieve this, then we can begin to think, think about our feelings, our behaviour, our needs and how best to meet them. The theories that help us to understand the relationship and the use of self are outlined, described and discussed.

Social work takes place in a variety of places and over different periods of time. There are excellent chapters on worker–client relationships when encounters are brief, and when they are long term, complex and sustained. There are fascinating chapters on working with strong feelings – fear, anger and aggression; hopelessness, despair

and depression; love and attraction. And when the work is done, or the relationship, for whatever reasons, has to stop, we learn a lot from the essay that discusses endings, completions and letting go.

So although we may feel that simply living life teaches us how to do relationships, it becomes clear that there is much to understand, learn and improve if we are to do them well. The book's final chapters therefore talk about how students can be helped to develop a relationship-based practice, the importance of supervision, and the value of having emotionally intelligent professional leadership. How we learn, how we are supervised, and how we are managed should be consistent with the principles of relationship-based social work. Recognising the importance of practices that are both reflective and reflexive runs as a golden thread throughout the book. *Relationship-Based Social Work: Getting to the Heart of Practice* celebrates the power of the human relationship to hold and to heal. Read this splendid book and warm *your* heart and sharpen *your* mind.

David Howe
Emeritus Professor of Social Work
University of East Anglia, Norwich

Preface to the Second Edition

This second edition of *Relationship-Based Social Work: Getting to the Heart of Practice* is being published eight years after the first one. Since the appearance of the first edition, macro-level political changes have influenced – largely negatively in our view – the ways in which individuals, families and groups facing difficulties are perceived, configured and responded to. In the context of these changes we feel that this book is more important than ever for social work practitioners who are working in a politically hostile landscape.

In the substantive chapters we have retained the book's overarching focus on psychodynamic and systemic understandings of human behaviour and on professional interventions, but have profiled more explicitly a commitment to anti-oppressive practice and diversity issues. Two new chapters have been included: a chapter on working with service users and carers replaces the first edition's service user perspective chapter and an additional chapter focuses on professional leadership in contemporary social work practice, acknowledging the central importance of relationship-based leadership for effective everyday practice.

It is our aim that this second edition will help to equip social workers with relationship-based knowledge, skills and values that resist the adverse effects of the prevailing political agenda, offering hope and new possibilities to people experiencing vulnerability and distress.

Gillian Ruch, Danielle Turney and Adrian Ward
September 2017