

# Book Review

## Book Review: Risky Practices – A Counsellors Guide to Risk Management in Private Practice

By Nigel McBride & Michael Tunnecliffe  
Published by Bayside Books  
132 pages, ISBN 1 876671 01 7

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This accessible book sets out a challenge to counsellors from all modalities to 'tighten up' the operation of their practices and limit the possibility of litigation stemming from lax protocols and documentation. 'Risky Practices' is a refreshing read on risk management principles within the counselling fraternity, offering tools to those in the industry to 'clean up' the proverbial backyard in regard to ethics, protocols and professional boundaries.

This easy to read book written by both a legal professional and a psychologist combines first hand experience of the pitfalls of running a private counselling practice, with legal responsibilities and expectations from an Australian perspective.

Blending three styles of instruction the book lays out, in the first instance, 'some fundamental legal, ethical and risk issues facing counsellors' in a didactic form. It illustrates how issues such as 'failure to properly diagnose', 'violating sexual boundaries' and 'ownership of records' to name a few, are regarded from a legal perspective.

This part of the book gives pithy summaries called 'Risk Nutshells' following each major section, which allows the reader to not only reinforce the information given but allows the 'time challenged' professional to get the most important points without reading the whole section if they so choose! This is undoubtedly the most important part of the book, relaying vital information in regard to legal responsibilities in counselling practice.

The second teaching method of the book uses a 'question and answer' style. Presenting 50 questions and practice scenarios, this section is stimulating as it operationalises the previous information, applying it to case scenarios. Whilst there are a number of questions and answers that are basic common sense, there are also a number which are more in-depth and challenging to the more experienced practitioner. It would have been helpful if this section had put the scenarios into some sort of order with headings for easy referencing later on. Groupings such as 'Client Files', 'Professional Fees' and 'Subcontracting' would have been helpful.

The final section of the book is the 'Appendices', which offers very tangible examples of 'Client Engagement Agreement's', 'Confidentiality Agreement' and 'Important Facts about Counselling'.

The authors rightly preface this section by stating that the examples presented need to be adapted to your own situation. To use them in their entirety, as presented, would indeed be cumbersome and send many clients running. However, the examples do point out pertinent points that should be covered before a client actually starts the counselling process.

This not only allows the client to be fully informed as to what they are undertaking, it also sets a good foundation of psychological boundaries for the duration of the counselling relationship.

The health profession is increasingly being confronted with litigation. 'Risky Practices' certainly offers the counselling professional basic tools to pre-empt and hopefully circumvent any potential legal action. The book is generally 'user friendly' and easy to read.

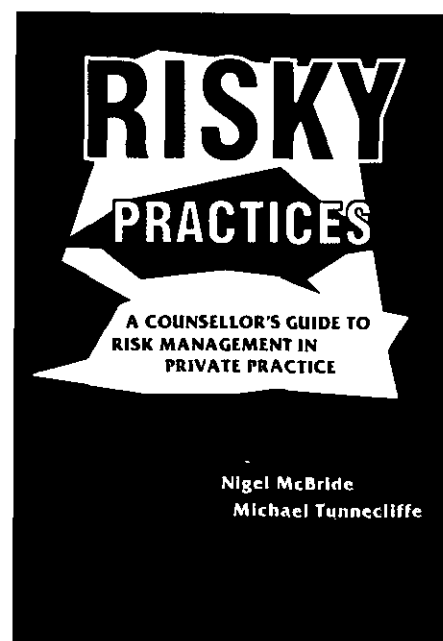
The authors have made a potentially 'dry' subject such as litigation quite engaging through their use of different methods of disseminating this important information. However, I think that the counselling professional needs to use discretion and thought in how to apply some of the given examples as this will most certainly shape, consciously or subconsciously, the counselling relationship to come.

A paragraph in the introduction explaining 'counsellor' as including 'clinical psychologists and those with similar postgraduate qualifications as well as other registered psychologists' is unnecessary and a little divisive. I don't think there is any real need to draw a distinction between a clinical psychologist and 'other registered psychologists', or indeed other qualified counselling professionals.

The book is a little 'black and white' at times and doesn't give a lot of room for the breadth of counselling relationships experienced in the therapeutic milieu, such as '...counsellors should generally avoid intentional physical contact with their clients.' (p.20).

It is the experience of many counsellors that there are times when physical contact may be warranted—of course, after permission has been sought. Physical touch in therapy was the focus of significant discussion at a world trauma conference held in Melbourne in 2000.

Despite these few areas of concern *Risky Practices* gets its major point of 'disclose and document' across well. It is an



informative and challenging book, which needs to be read in conjunction with thoughtful reflection of one's own practice – this will allow appropriate application of the information according to each counselling circumstance. At the end of the day, I guess the 'proof is in the pudding'. So I ask myself 'does *Risky Practices* motivate me into tightening up my protocols and procedures?' and I reply, 'Yes it does'.

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*As well as study and private practice Cait consults to organisations on a broad range of issues and runs 'follow-up' post-traumatic stress groups for Vietnam Veterans' and partners at the Vietnam Veterans' Counselling Service. Cait is the Manager of Trauma Services at Dinjerra Counselling and Development and is a mother with three sons.*

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