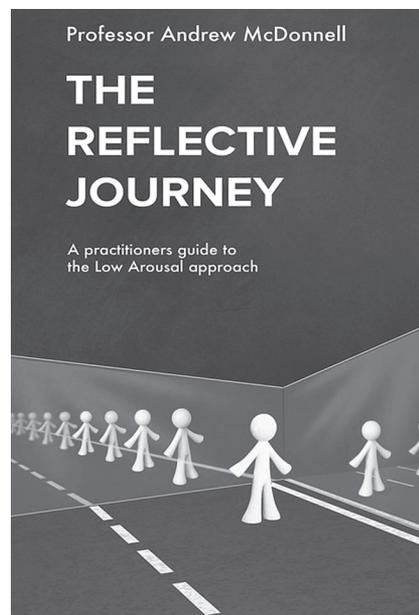


Title:

The reflective journey: a practitioner's guide to the Low Arousal approach

Author: **Andrew McDonnell**
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Reviewed by:

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Having heard Andy McDonnell speak many times about his ideas and practice, I was very happy to be sent a copy of the book he has written on the Low Arousal approach and keen to read this. The Low Arousal approach was developed with his colleague and friend, the psychologist, Dr Michael McCreadie who sadly died last year.

As its title suggests, the book is aimed at practitioners who have to understand and deal with behaviours which challenge them, often in care settings. That said, it is a very useful book for anyone to read to understand their response to challenging situations in life and within their own families. The essence of the Low Arousal approach is that the behaviour (eg raised voice or invasion of space), emotional state and response of other people (ie parents/carers or staff) either adds

to or reduces the challenge and that it is crucial for staff to recognise this and to modify their actions when dealing with behaviours which they find challenging.

All too often in the past, we have focused on the behaviours of the individual in isolation and this still happens today. Behaviour management plans are still produced which appear to locate the 'problem' within the person, rather than taking a transactional view and including 'targets' for staff. So this book invites practitioners to examine their own behaviour first and then to reflect on how they can change this at the time or the next time. McDonnell also advises staff to apologise to those concerned when they have increased a person's anxiety or stress by their actions. Similarly, he argues that if the language staff use towards an individual implies they are 'bad'

then that is the view of themselves that the person is likely to adopt.

The book is in three parts – Looking within, Managing behaviours and Continuing the journey – and comprises 14 chapters. These can be read by an individual or by a group of staff to generate discussion. Each chapter explores an emotion or response such as stress, empathy, anger, fear, embarrassment, fatigue, and the degree of control over one's life. Most chapters have a checklist whereby the reader can rate themselves on different dimensions to raise their awareness of their part in understanding and managing behaviours which challenge.

I would wholeheartedly recommend this book to all who live with or work with individuals whose behaviour is described as challenging and would anticipate that if the Low Arousal approach is adopted, then the incidence of difficult behaviours would reduce and perhaps more importantly, the actions of staff and carers towards the individuals they support would change for the benefit of all concerned.