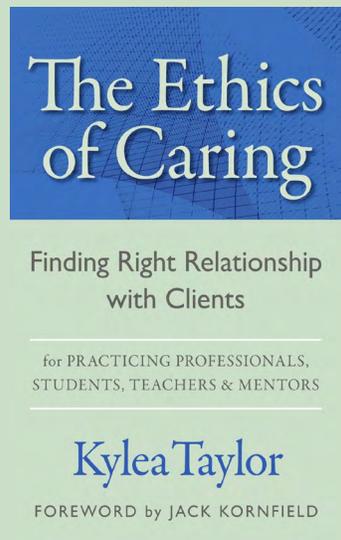


The Ethics of Caring: Finding Right Relationship with Clients

by Kylea Taylor

Reviewed by Gunnel Minett

REVIEW



The Ethics of Caring: Finding Right Relationship with Clients by Kylea Taylor. Hanford Mead Publishers, Santa Cruz, CA, third edition, 2017, 335 pages. Paperback, £19.99. ISBN 978-1-59275-008-5

This is the third edition of a book that was first published in 1995. Over the years it has been included in training programs throughout the world and become an essential tool in training practitioners of all healing professions. Much has happened in this field since then. This version has been updated and adjusted to meet the needs of practitioners today, but the focus is still to describe the right relationship between therapist and client. This includes ethical values as well as vulnerabilities.

With her many years of personal experience of holotropic breathwork, Kylea Taylor has the experience and wisdom needed to write this thorough and important guide. Her wisdom shines through on every page and makes the book an essential aid in introducing the safety regulations that are so necessary in the healing professions.

The book addresses a number of important issues, not just in relation to breathwork but for healing practitioners of all kinds. Helping others to help themselves is something deeply ingrained in us, but even when we mean well, there are pitfalls and vulnerabilities to look out for and recognize. Sometimes it is simply not enough to mean well: we also need to have some level of understanding and insight into what is good and bad practice to be able to help and find the right relationship with others.

Why Safety Matters

There has been a tremendous change in our attitudes to safety in recent years, particularly when it comes to caring for children. Many of the things that we were allowed to get away with as children would be unthinkable today. Health and safety is paramount and we would not have it any other way. The same attitude to safety applies to many other professions and aspects of life: builders wear hard hats and visibility vests; wearing seat belts is compulsory, and the list goes on.

But there are still some areas of life where safety is still a matter of debate. One such area (perhaps the most important and most surprising) is psychotherapy. Psychotherapy is a relatively modern profession, which includes counselling, body therapy, breathwork and other techniques, involving practitioners with a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience. This can even include pastoral carers such as clergy, hospice workers and mentors. Their clients are usually very vulnerable due to some form of crisis in their lives, making them, in a sense, as vulnerable as young children. Yet the safety regulations that are required for working with children do not apply to working with adults. All forms of healing therapy can have profound and long-lasting effects on those who search for help in times of distress; therefore, an obvious question

must be why is this area not as regulated as others when it comes to safety?

It has been documented that people in therapy, especially trauma therapy, can regress mentally and emotionally to their childhood and enter very vulnerable states of mind. To deal with people in these circumstances requires not just knowledge and skill but also the life experience and wisdom that takes hard work and time to acquire. One would assume that the safety aspects would be as important in this therapeutic situation as for other forms of “child-care”, but there is little in the way of regulation of these professions.

Practitioners of healing therapies are often self-employed with their own small (often one-person) practices, and the newer forms of healing therapies, sometimes referred to as “new age” therapies (e.g., Reiki, holotropic and rebirthing breathwork, self-help groups and so forth), are mostly self-regulated. This is not to say that the self-regulation does not work, but it can be difficult to objectively judge the quality of a therapeutic method before it’s been established long enough to have sufficient evidence of its results and best practice. However, to rely on self-regulation alone increases the risk of poor safety and quality control in ways that would be unacceptable in other professional fields.

In rebirthing breathwork, where the focus

is very much on helping clients through altered states of consciousness, safety should be high on the agenda, but for various reasons proper quality control has been and still is lacking. One reason seems to be that among older breathwork practitioners there is still a firm belief (dating from the “bygone” 1970s) that just knowing the breathing technique itself is sufficient. In other words, practitioners are not taking responsibility for their role in working with a powerful and potentially mind-altering technique. Many still see themselves as being guided by some form of higher guidance that somehow will prevent them from doing anything wrong or harmful to their clients. This can often result in the attitude that everything is initiated via their guidance, and that anything bad is created by the client’s negative thoughts rather than practitioner incompetence.

This belief in a “higher order” or power guiding the therapy has meant that a need for a theoretical framework has not been seen as essential. Partly this can be blamed on a lack of acceptance of altered states of consciousness in mainstream psychology. This in turn has forced many breathwork practitioners to turn to ancient Eastern traditional explanations and to rely on anecdotal evidence and a guru-style of teaching, but such reliance on the “elders” to teach and build up a theoretical framework for the techniques has not resulted in a good out-

come. A potentially powerful alternative to conventional psychotherapy has been marginalized by mainstream society, and worse, it has resulted in uneven quality between practitioners. Rebirthing breathwork can act as an illustration of why safety, and a focus on non-harming and ethics of caring (as in this book), are essential in areas that are by their nature difficult to teach. Kylea Taylor's book emphasizes that, in these forms of therapy, the professional healer must not underestimate the power of their work and the effect it can have on people.

Taylor addresses this in Chapter 2—"Honoring the Web of Life"—where she describes the difficulties of being a therapist:

We must be willing to deepen our personal awareness in order to learn more about our motivations. We must be willing to discover the point at which our unique qualities are in the best balance to serve others. And we must also be willing to widen our understanding of the external contexts and connections that affect our professional relationships." (p 40)

Working with clients who bring up deep emotional trauma can be very upsetting for both client and therapist. As Taylor rightly points out, therapists are human beings too. This is one of the big challenges of being a therapist: to be able to steer a client through

the rough, inner sea of their emotions and to make sure the crossing is as safe as possible. The real task is to ensure that both practitioner and client end up safely on the other shore. It requires not just knowledge of the human psyche but also self-awareness and willingness to learn on the job, and to seek help from supervisors when that is needed.

An essential aspect of the "right relationship" is to be ethical in all aspects of the profession—from creating a practice that offers a safe space for clients, to managing money and booking appointments, to sexual behavior and other ethical behaviors. Taylor points out two aspects in particular: (1) the ethical relationship itself is healing, and (2) the importance of learning from ethical missteps. Fostering the right relationship also involves an ethical attention to the client's needs in extraordinary states of mind, which is especially important since altered states of consciousness are still not fully recognized in some forms of psychotherapy and most likely are unknown to the client. By its very nature, breathwork/rebirthing breathwork is an area that is difficult to investigate with any scientific stringency, therefore it can at times be difficult to provide suitable explanations and reassurances to the client. A practitioner requires a collective of life experience and wisdom that cannot be achieved by simply studying books, and some self-experience of these states of mind. For those who have never had a

similar experience, it can be very difficult to help someone who is experiencing mind-altering (and perhaps life-altering) states of consciousness.

I recommend this book highly to all those who seek better ways to practice, to be safe, and to keep those in your care safe—or, as Taylor says, to find the right relationship.

The Ethics of Caring: Finding Right Relationship with Clients has won a silver medal from the Nautilus Book Awards in the category of Relationships and Communication.

For more information about Kylea Taylor go to <https://kyleataylor.com>

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