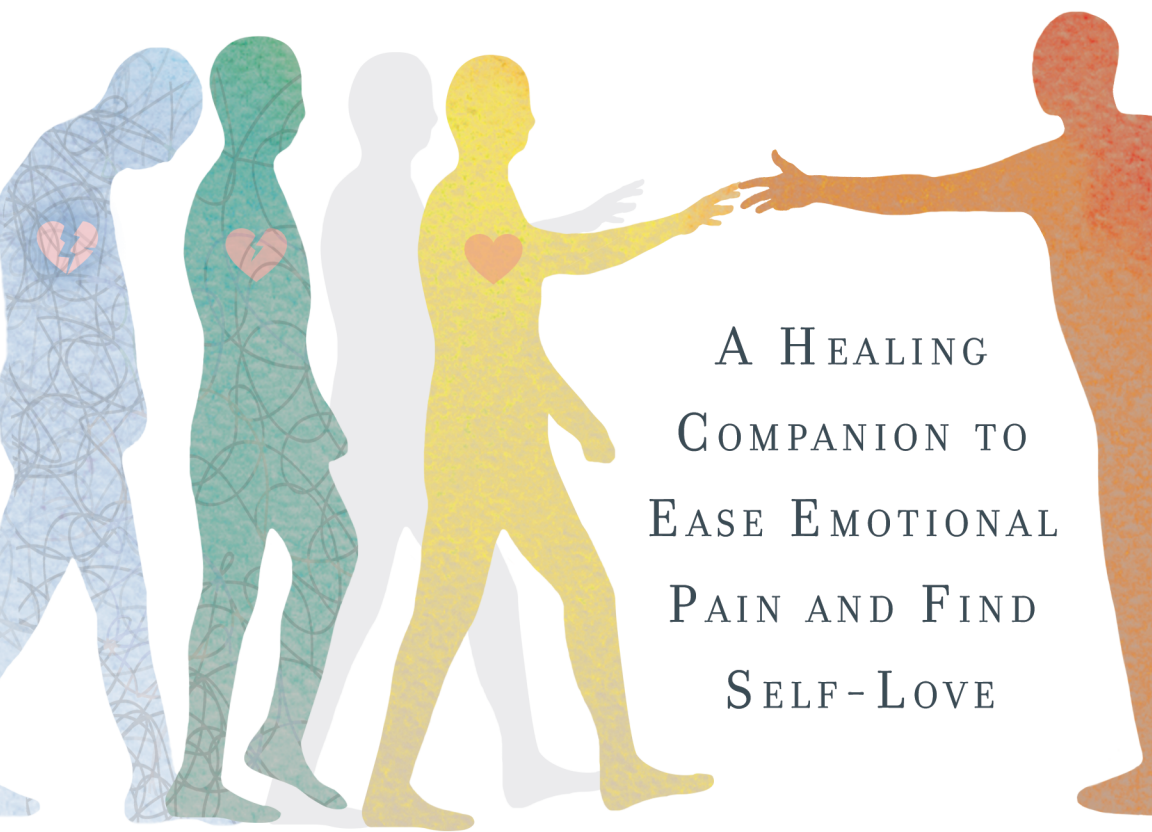

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B E C O M I N G W H O L E



A HEALING
COMPANION TO
EASE EMOTIONAL
PAIN AND FIND
SELF-LOVE

Bruce Alan Kehr, M.D.

Praise for *Becoming Whole*

“*Becoming Whole* is best described as a ‘pocket therapist.’ By sharing optimistic and compelling patient stories, personal reflections, and practical tools, Dr. Kehr literally becomes our “Companion Advisor” and provides a highly readable framework for understanding and solving many of the common problems we face throughout our lives. Weaving together self-help, psychotherapy, and medication, this book is a must-read for anyone striving to become whole and to create a more fulfilling life.”

—**Harry L. Leider, M.D.**, MBA, chief medical officer
and group vice president of Walgreens

“*Becoming Whole* feels so personal, as if I’m sitting and talking with the doctor in his office. I love the vivid, real cases in which we can find ourselves, the step-by-step tactics to do something, and the songs to go with each lesson. It’s an emotional, visual, and auditory feast that adds a tactile hug to complete one’s transformation to wholeness. My brain is on fire with new energy about what it means to be human.”

—**Scott Halford**, Emmy Award-winning writer and producer,
Wall Street Journal best-selling author of *Activate Your Brain*

“*Becoming Whole* takes a new track in providing insights into the therapeutic process. Instead of it being a psychoanalytic mystery, the process of what the therapist is trying to help the patient accomplish is spelled out explicitly. Cogent case examples are given that further clarify the therapeutic interactions. These are in the setting of a holistic approach that also includes medicines, vitamins, and other adjuncts. Together, these provide an excellent road map toward wellness.”

—**Robert M. Post, M.D.**, professor of psychiatry at George Washington School of Medicine, head of the Bipolar Collaborative Network, and former chief of the Biological Psychiatry Branch of the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH)

“My family is one of the millions who has a loved one with a mental disorder. *Becoming Whole* gave us game-changing, life-saving strategies that helped all of us. Dr. Kehr, who is as empathetic as he is brilliant, delivers on his promise to be a healing companion. The book is destined to become a classic.”

—**Mary LoVerde**, Hall of Fame speaker and author of *I Used to Have a Handle on Life but It Broke*

“*Becoming Whole* is an insightful, accessible, powerful, and revealing self-help guide for therapy in which psychiatrist Bruce Alan Kehr, M.D., artfully uses patient stories to illuminate the challenges we face in untangling our hearts. Because these challenges shape the way we experience ourselves and our lives, *Becoming Whole* is not only a healing companion but a valuable life companion as well.”

—**Steve Sidel**, founder and CEO of Mindoula Health

“A sensitively written guidebook full of engaging case histories and thoughtful action steps that empower readers to find their own

solutions to difficult matters of the heart and mind. This book is invaluable for anyone seeking solace from pain.”

—**Leslie D. Michelson**, author of *The Patient’s Playbook*

“Dr. Kehr’s book should be lauded for providing strategies that alleviate biological and psychological factors underlying human suffering and should be required reading for any young adult as a road map on the real life ahead of them, as well as for anyone wishing to expand their situational awareness.”

—**Francis Mas, M.D.**, clinical professor of psychiatry
at the NYU School of Medicine

“This powerful book will take you on a guided tour to the deep inside of your heart. Bruce Alan Kehr is an experienced and empathic companion on this journey. He encourages those with a tangled heart to answer the key questions of their emotional lives and shows an effective way to becoming whole again. I will share this book with many of my patients and just can’t wait for its international distribution!”

—**Marcel G. Sieberer**, professor of psychiatry and
psychotherapy at Hannover Medical School

“A renowned thought leader in the field of psychiatry, Dr. Bruce Kehr succeeds in demystifying the most complex challenges we face as humans, offering empathy and understanding as well as thoughtful and practical solutions for building the relationships and lives we deserve. This book belongs on every bed stand to serve as a ready resource as well as a helpful reminder of the hope and possibilities of a future when people care for and take care of the people around them.”

—**Denise Brosseau**, author of *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?*

“If you are suffering from the aftereffects of having been bullied, manipulated, controlled, neglected, or abused, then this book is for you. *Becoming Whole* offers innovative strategies to bring the emotional peace you long for. I highly recommend this book.”

—**Sam Horn**, author of six award-winning books translated into 17 languages, including *Take the Bully by the Horns* and *Tongue Fu!*;
top-rated speaker at the INC 500/5000

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A HEALING COMPANION
to EASE EMOTIONAL PAIN
AND FIND SELF-LOVE

Bruce Alan Kehr, M.D.



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First Edition

To Barbara, Melanie, and Lisa, whose unwavering love and unyielding belief in me continuously nourish my compassion and empathy and provide me the strength to heal . . . and to the many patients who have honored me with their confidence and trust and allowed me the privilege of helping them through their emotionally turbulent times.

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**BEGIN THE JOURNEY:
EASE EMOTIONAL PAIN
AND FIND SELF-LOVE**

SESSION ONE

Let's Talk

Opening the door to the waiting room and looking out, I notice that there is someone new sitting on the couch. It's you. You look lost in thought and are clearly in distress. I greet you with a warm smile, and as you look up at me, your eyes reveal both nervousness and the faint shadow of hopeful expectation. A familiar feeling of anticipation arises within me as I escort you back to my office: This moment marks the beginning of a new chapter in your life—one defined by healing—and I feel honored to be a part of your journey. Together, we will begin to untangle your heart and ease the emotional pain that has brought you here in the first place. Eager to hear your story, I ask you the first of many questions: “Tell me, what brings you in today? What has been troubling you?”

Your answers reveal a longing to unburden and a desire to be understood. They also subtly hint at your struggle to understand—truly understand—yourself.

“Tell me,” I ask, “How do you feel?”

You came in to feel better, to figure things out. Your life may not make any sense to you at all. Perhaps it never has, or, once upon a

time, maybe it did, but now you feel lost—confused. I absorb your emotional pain moment to moment as your wounds are exposed one by one: new wounds that need mending and old ones painfully reopened with the hope that they will finally heal.

As your story slowly unfolds, you allow me to join you in a place deep inside your heart, to listen and learn and help it recover from these wounds. But the human heart is complicated—primitive, filled with dark corners, but with areas of illumination too. It is both settled and restless, satisfied and yearning, joyful and grief-stricken, lustful and inhibited, elated and tortured, fractured and whole. At times, our hearts are at war with others. At times we are at war within ourselves.

Our hearts and minds tend to repeat patterns of feeling and behaving that can sabotage deep emotional intimacy, unintentionally wounding others or ourselves. The triggers may be events in the present that evoke the past through the unconscious,¹ a vast swamp beyond our awareness filled with memories, feelings, and our darkest thoughts, at first dimly perceived. As they become more visible, they may be frightening; we try to avoid them at all cost by establishing an elaborate defensive system that represses² the demons inside.

Ridding ourselves of the demons in our hearts can be a terrifying process. We keep them under wraps for good reason: To reawaken them may overwhelm our sense of self and threaten to crush it. Yet they tangle up our lives and sabotage our happiness. It may be painful, difficult, and emotionally challenging, but working through repressed thoughts and memories is the first step toward healing. However, you don't have to face this challenge alone: I will be at your side for as long as it takes. I will be your companion.

Those who enter my office and sit on the couch must muster up their courage to open up in a way that they may never have before. A wise psychiatrist once said, "Never underestimate the power of listening. You may be the first person in their entire life who ever

truly listened.” For me, this work is both a calling and a privilege. I’m glad you’re here. Let’s get to work.

What to Expect from this Book

PATIENT STORIES

The contents of this book are devoted to helping you untangle your own heart or the heart of a loved one. Each of the twelve sessions that follow will explore a commonly experienced emotional issue in depth, using patient stories to clarify and contextualize key themes and outcomes. I will discuss these issues as if you were actually in treatment with me and will provide specific guidance to help you feel better, function more effectively, and end the patterns that sabotage your happiness. By walking you through the ways a psychiatrist or psychotherapist can help resolve these issues, I hope to empower you to seek out your own resolutions, whether that means using this book as a self-help tool for your own personal reflection, seeking therapy for the first time, changing your treatment plan, or helping your loved ones find the support they need.

I’ll also invite you into my office and share with you the secret inner lives of a number of my patients. Although these stories are fictionalized, they represent how I’ve helped real people become whole. By reading them, you will learn how talk therapy uncovers a patient’s unconscious feelings and memories; how a psychotherapist empathizes, interprets, and clarifies; and how this process untangles the patients’ hearts and ends the patterns that sabotage their happiness.³ Throughout each story, I will share with you some of the healing comments I made to the patient at key inflection points in their therapy, as well as what I was feeling at the time. At other times, I will share with you how they expressed deeply held,

intense feelings toward me (called **transference**⁴) and how we were able to use those experiences to further their understanding of other important relationships in their past and present.

What you'll come to appreciate is a portrait of how the patient and I interact and how feelings and memories from my own life emerge to enable me to join the patient where they are. I will share my feelings with you at these crucial moments, as they will deepen your understanding of what goes on inside the mind and heart of a therapist to facilitate the healing process. Each exchange will illuminate a brief interlude in the telling of the tale, where I offer support, clarity, and hopefulness as the therapy unfolds. I want these tales from real therapy sessions to demystify psychiatry, talk therapy, and the healing process itself and to give you an idea of whether this is something you may need in your own life.

A cautionary note: Some of the patients' stories, particularly those that describe a history of childhood sexual abuse, may be particularly disturbing. In reading them, you may feel that they have nothing in common with your own childhood. You may decide to stop reading partway through the story, and if you feel that is best for your emotional well-being, I respect your decision. At the same time, I promise you that each story, no matter how dire or desperate, will end on a hopeful note and will have something to teach.

THE BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL MODEL

At times, self-help is not enough to alleviate emotional suffering. This is where psychotherapy⁵ and psychopharmacology⁶ can be enormously helpful. Most of the stories in this book relate to patients in talk therapy who are also receiving medication. Although it is not the focus here, I will discuss how to select a psychotherapist or psychiatrist that best meets your needs, the roles of different

prescription medications and supplements, and how to work with your doctor to uncover underlying psychological and medical conditions that affect how you think, feel, and function.

The **biopsychosocial model**⁷ is a way of understanding how emotional suffering and illness are affected by multiple factors ranging from societal to molecular; **epigenetics**⁸ refers to how external factors, including your lifestyle choices, can switch genes on and off inside your brain cells, for better or for worse. Under the biopsychosocial model and using epigenetic principles,⁹ a psychiatrist evaluates and treats the **whole person**, not just a series of symptoms. The fundamental principles of this model involve the interplay of biology, early life experiences, and recent and current relationships, which are woven together into a framework of understanding that allows you and your doctor to make sense of what is going on inside and around you, to begin to untangle your life.

Doctors who practice this model look at every relevant domain in your life—including genetic, biological, psychological, family, social, environmental, existential, and spiritual—and seek to understand how these domains work together or against each other to affect your well-being. They thoroughly assess the history of your condition, as well as your family history, and they may suggest genetic testing or other laboratory tests to gain more insight and provide an even deeper and well-informed evaluation.

You should choose a psychiatrist who practices under the biopsychosocial model—one who will leave no stone unturned in getting to the bottom of all of the factors that interfere with your full recovery. Your doctor will partner with you to develop a comprehensive treatment plan to achieve a full remission of your symptoms—to enable you to **become whole**.

MY QUESTIONS, YOUR ANSWERS

I am a physician, attended medical school, and trained at a psychiatric residency program. I have been practicing psychiatry for nearly forty years. My patients have taught me countless lessons every single day about how to heal a human heart that may feel lost, hopelessly conflicted, or in seemingly interminable emotional pain.

You and I will partner together to leverage these lessons as I teach you to untangle your heart. Much of the teaching will be in the form of questions that I pose to you. You will reflect on your life more deeply and will want to develop as comprehensive an understanding of yourself as possible. Then, I will provide clear steps that will help you end the behavioral patterns that sabotage your happiness and that will lead you down a path to a richer life experience. You'll find these steps at the end of the sessions, in a section called "Begin to Heal."

As you answer these questions about yourself and those you love—and some of the questions will require a good deal of hard thinking—you will broaden and deepen your understanding of why your life is tangled up. I strongly encourage you to write out your answers to the questions as you go along in a notebook or journal that I'll refer to throughout as your "workbook." Your workbook will become a valuable asset that you can refer back to from time to time, particularly during periods of emotional distress, to help further your understanding. Writing out your answers will help you think about your situation in a new way, and you may discover a path forward that you hadn't thought of before. If you are not yet in therapy and decide to begin, these answers can also serve as a starting point to help the therapist get to know you and give you an early view of what to expect.

THE ROLE OF MUSIC

I love music, especially for the therapeutic, healing potential it holds. It is a universal means of expressing the human condition. I use it at times in my practice, particularly as a way to reach patients who initially find it difficult to express their emotions. As we begin therapy, they may find it easier to relate to feelings that are poignantly portrayed in the lyrics of certain songs than to relate to me. In addition, music may help a patient access certain emotions and memories that were previously buried in their unconscious mind. I've tried to recreate that experience for you in this book.

Most sessions will feature a popular song that portrays aspects of the human condition illustrated by the patient's story (for links to the songs and other information, visit DrBruceKehr.com/music). The lyrics may relate to your own story as well and may elicit thoughts, feelings, and memories from inside of you. The songs will teach you more about the human heart and will further your capacity to think about yourself and your life.

And it is not just the lyrics themselves. If you also listen to the timbre of the singer's voice, it can move you to feel powerful emotions.¹⁰ You may feel less alone by listening to songs that connect with how you are feeling and what you are struggling with in your own life. You may also be inspired to reach out to a loved one who may have shut you out or who has difficulty identifying and vocalizing their own feelings.

How to Use this Book

Each session contained in this book will bring new insights into patterns of behavior and emotional vulnerabilities that tangle you up. That said, the way you choose to read this book is entirely dependent on what you're hoping to get out of it.

If you are looking for an in-depth overview of what treatment

looks like and can achieve, you may choose to read the entire book. It contains many valuable lessons that will bring you a richer understanding of your own life and the lives of those you love. Reading the stories of people overcoming crises will leave you feeling hopeful, inspired, and less alone.

If you are seeking relief from a specific problem, you can use this book in a highly targeted way. Simply consult the table of contents to zero in on the issues that pertain to your current circumstances—the ones that create that feeling of inner turmoil—and before long, you will be on your way to feeling better. You may find yourself consulting the individual chapters of this book again and again as those circumstances change and evolve throughout your life or lending out the book to your loved ones as they work to solve their own issues.

Begin to Heal: Get Started by Looking Inward

Let's begin the process of untangling your life by introducing you to self-reflection and psychotherapy. Use your workbook to begin journaling your answers. You might want to glance at all the questions before you begin writing, because some of your answers may overlap—and that's okay. If your answers to one or more of these questions make you feel uncomfortable, sad, or angry, that's okay too. Don't rush this process. It could take you a half hour or half a day. There is no right or wrong way to go about addressing these questions; the main goal here is to simply work through all of them.

Step 1: Let's examine how you have been feeling recently.

In general, how has your life been going? Are you basically satisfied in your love relationships? If not, why?

What about relationships at work—how are they going? Are you satisfied with your job or career? Is it consistent with your interests and aptitudes? Write out what you love and what you hate about your work.

Are you able to like and love yourself, recognizing with pride your many strengths, despite your inevitable flaws and shortcomings? If not, how are you feeling about yourself? Do you feel that you are moving forward in your life? Or are you stuck in an unhappy and emotionally painful place? If the latter, list the sources of emotional pain. Do you feel imprisoned by feelings of anger and disappointment? If so, describe how these feelings are affecting you and your life. Do you feel unloved, disliked, or disrespected? If so, by whom?

Are most days a struggle? Or do you generally feel pretty good, able to weather the ups and downs of life? If the former, describe how you feel on those days. Do you feel that control over your life basically resides within you? Or do you feel battered and blown about by forces and circumstances around you? If the latter, describe those forces and circumstances and how they affect your day-to-day life. Is the stress in your life manageable? Or do you frequently feel overwhelmed? If the latter, what are the sources of these feelings?

Step 2: Begin to write the history of your problems.

When did your life begin to go off track? What was the setting? Describe it in as much detail as you can. Who were the people involved? How did they behave toward you? How might you understand their behaviors in the context of what was going on in their life at that time? What life stresses were they living through? What

is their relationship like with their mother, their father, and their significant others, and how might that influence their behavior toward you? Was there a major disappointment or heartbreak in your life that you need to grieve? What was it?

Step 3: Engage in the Process of Introspection.

Once you have written out the answers to these questions, read them over several times to let them sink in. Write down any associated thoughts that come to mind. Then meditate on the answers and the questions themselves by engaging in the process of introspection: by dedicating thirty or forty-five minutes a day—perhaps in the evening in a quiet, darkened room—to begin to think about these issues. If this feels overwhelming, shorten the amount of time to five or ten minutes. Talk to yourself about what you are thinking and feeling. An inner dialogue in the service of understanding is a good thing.

Your troubles may relate to something that happened recently at home or at work that you can figure out on your own, by providing yourself sufficient time for reflecting on it. You can also speak with a trusted friend, family member, or partner who can provide support and advice. Recent upsets or traumas, ones that are not too entrenched, sometimes respond well to ventilating and unburdening to a caring and loving person in your life and do not require professional intervention.

Feel Hopeful and Optimistic as We Work Together

Within your own heart, there is a complicated tangle of emotions that continually influence your thinking and behavior. Conscious emotions are but a small portion of those that govern how you

think, feel, and behave; they are the tip of the iceberg.¹¹ If your heart feels all tangled up, by reading this book, you will begin your own personal journey to untangle your heart *and* your life—and to begin becoming whole. It's important that you nourish this hope; the road to emotional health is long and difficult, but it's crucial that you not give up.

You no longer need to feel alone with your emotional distress. I will join you on your journey as our work together unfolds. In the lessons that follow, you will discover that there are many others out in the world just like you, and you will recognize aspects of yourself as you read about them.

If you remain steadfast in your journey, you will uncover the story of your own heart, come to know yourself better, and begin to gain some powerful insights. You will identify patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that have needlessly tangled up your life and that have sabotaged your happiness in love and at work.

“Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.” Aristotle's words are as relevant today as during his lifetime, almost 2,400 years ago. They are further supported by a similar quote by Socrates: “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Now that you know what to expect, let's get started.

Let's talk.

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About the Author



Author and national award-winning psychiatrist Bruce Alan Kehr, MD, is the founder and president of Potomac Psychiatry (PotomacPsychiatry.com) since 1981. *Washingtonian* magazine awarded him their Top Doctor designation from 2012 to 2017. In 2016, the magazine named him The Face of Psychiatry in their “Faces of Washington” issue. Dr. Kehr serves on the Board of the Institute on Aging of the University of Pennsylvania and served as its chairman from 2006 to 2009. The readers and editors of *PharmaVOICE* selected him in 2007 as one of the 100 Most Inspiring and Influential Leaders in the Life Sciences Industry. He is also an Eagle Scout.

Dr. Kehr received training in psychiatry at Tufts New England Medical Center, where he was chief resident; in neuropsychiatry at the VA Boston Healthcare System—Jamaica Plain; and in psychoanalysis at the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute. He practices psychiatry and psychotherapy using the biopsychosocial model, designed to evaluate and treat the whole person by understanding each individual’s unique genetic, biological, psychological, social, and life-stage attributes.

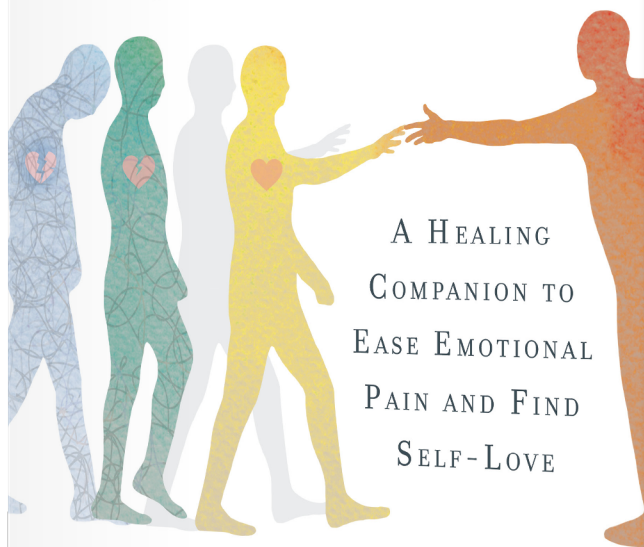
Author photo by Michael Bennett Kress Photography.

Becoming Whole

Dr. Kehr lives in Potomac, Maryland, with his wife, Barbara, a psychotherapist. They have two daughters: Melanie, an immigration attorney who advocates for asylum on behalf of refugees fleeing domestic violence and child abuse, and Lisa, a psychiatric nurse practitioner graduate student.

Learn more by visiting DrBruceKehr.com.

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SELF-LOVE

Bruce Alan Kehr, M.D.

Preorder *Becoming Whole* at
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Disclaimer

The material and information provided within this book does not constitute medical advice, and the strategies and treatment modalities discussed in the sessions may not be applicable to you, your family members, or your friends. No part of the content of this book is intended by the author or publisher to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment by a qualified mental healthcare professional. No physician–patient relationship, explicit or implied, exists between the publisher, author, and you, the reader. This book is not a substitute for a relationship between you, as a patient, and a qualified mental healthcare professional.

The patient stories contained within the book are illustrative of emotional issues faced by many of us as we go through life, and some of the themes presented are universal. Although lessons learned from the treatment of actual patients are included in the stories, the historical events and facts represented have been changed to protect the identities of any real patients and to protect their confidentiality. This includes, among other minor alterations, the names, ages, careers, the number and sex of their children, and the careers of the patients' parents. Consequently, all characters that appear in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

The information included in each chapter or “session” is for illustrative and educational purposes only, to help you understand what

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