

Review of *Innføring i intensiv psykodynamisk korttidsterapi* by Jon Anders Lied

BY LISA LEVANDER

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST ALVIK PSYCHIATRIC CLINIC
NORTHERN STOCKHOLM PSYCHIATRY

Amidst the joyful bustle of new parenthood and preparing to return to work after both parental leave and a long summer break—while feeling a bit anxious about the return—I found myself seeking guidance in Jon Anders Lied’s *Innføring i intensiv psykodynamisk korttidsterapi*. This Norwegian guide to ISTDP revived both my confidence and passion for the work. Lied’s approachable style, coupled with his deep insights into psychodynamic theory, was exactly what I needed to remind myself why I fell in love with ISTDP in the first place.



understanding of the underlying principles. Lied describes what might seem like a slower way of working with ISTDP compared to the therapy sessions typically shown in workshops, an approach to ISTDP suited to the trainee. As I read Lied’s work, I have felt both seen and relieved. In my journey as a learner of ISTDP, I have sometimes felt overwhelmed by the complexity of ISTDP and questioned my ability to effectively work as an ISTDP therapist. Along with a sense of relief, reading this book rekindled my enthusiasm for ISTDP.

Lied is an ISTDP therapist based in Trondheim who, besides working as a therapist, also teaches and supervises psychology students. His relatively new book is aimed primarily at those who are new to ISTDP and want to learn the basics of the model. In addition to introducing ISTDP, the book offers a jargon-free and accessible overview of psychodynamic theory. Readers familiar with Patricia Coughlin will recognize many of her views on ISTDP in Lied’s writing. “Go slow in the beginning and you will go faster in the end” is a saying of hers that clearly resonates throughout this book. Coughlin often stresses that many ISTDP students and therapists are not ambitious enough; they need to do their homework. Lied, on the contrary, focuses more on the problems that may arise when trainees have a strong desire to accomplish unlockings similar to those shown in the tapes and dialogues of the masters of ISTDP. Lied describes frequent issues that arise when trainees use techniques without a good enough

Like many others, I was instantly intrigued by ISTDP when the model was first introduced at university. I then had the opportunity to take the pre-core course as part of my clinical psychology education. When my teacher presented his therapy tapes, the treatment model seemed magical, igniting a strong desire within me to learn how to work in this powerful way. I was particularly drawn to the active therapeutic stance that I felt suited my personality, something that felt both exciting and challenging. During my early years as a clinical psychologist I did my best to use what I had learned about ISTDP, all the while longing to start core training. As I look back at that time a few years down the line, I can see that I made quite a few beginner’s mistakes, and I am reminded of these mistakes as I was reading *Innføring i intensiv psykodynamisk korttidsterapi*. I realize now that I needed this book both before and during my core training. Throughout the book, Lied emphasizes the principles of ISTDP that underpin interventions, rather than describing

specific types of interventions. Lied empathetically outlines common mistakes often made by ISTDP trainees. Inexperienced therapists may attempt interventions without a solid understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the model, basically without knowing the *why* and *when* to make certain interventions. A common mistake is pressing for feelings or blocking defenses too early in the process, mistakes that may impact negatively on the alliance. This can happen, for instance, if the therapist asks the patient not to look away before the patient fully understands and agrees that the behavior is a defense that the patient wants help with, and so he or she may feel criticized.

One patient in particular came to my mind when I read the book. This occurred during a period in my life when ISTDP core training was still only a dream. The patient in question was a middle-aged man who clearly suffered a lot from anxiety and was struggling to connect with his feelings. He had a lot of physiological symptoms that were clearly related to anxiety. Social situations usually caused him to be very anxious and depressed, and he was on the whole a very lonely and depressed man

our patients before it is appropriate to press for feelings, and a large part of the book focuses on various aspects of the working alliance. Lied neatly defines the goal, task and bond in a more tangible way than these concepts usually are described in the psychodynamic literature, and he also nicely ties his definition to core features of ISTDP. Lied uses only a few cases to illustrate theoretical concepts and techniques, and the reader gets to know these patients quite well. The sessions come to life on the page and really give you a feeling of what therapy with Lied may look like. Unlike the profoundly moving cases described in Lied's book, the therapy course with the teacher was doomed from the start. If only I had read a book like this at the time! I might have realized sooner that I was not working nearly enough with conscious therapeutic alliance. I was pressing for feelings before we'd even agreed that this was our therapeutic focus! Sure, we agreed on the problem and the goal, but I didn't spend nearly enough time ensuring we were on the same page about our task. When I finally confronted my patient about the stuck state of therapy, he revealed that he had actually wanted CBT all along, but he hadn't told me! The therapy ended with me referring the patient

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whose anxieties and depressive thoughts also made him come across in a very dismissive way towards others. I felt confident that this patient would benefit from ISTDP. Thus, every time he told me about his problems – I pressed for feelings. And the poor man became nauseous most of the time. The therapy went on without any improvement, and I remember it as a sad loop of me pressing for feelings, then, the poor guy becoming nauseous, and ultimately both of us ending up feeling disappointed—though for different reasons. Looking back through the lens of this book, it is clear to me that I did not go slowly in the beginning, and neither the patient nor I were given an adequate chance to understand the process.

The structure of Lied's book reflects the overarching principle of going slow in the beginning. It is not until the last part of the book that Lied describes pressing for feelings and working with unlockings of the unconscious. Again and again, he emphasizes the collaborative work that we must do with

to a clinic that specializes in CBT. Maybe I hadn't paid close enough attention since I thought ISTDP would be just right for this patient, and I was too eager to dive in. Had I gone slow in the beginning, we could probably have gone faster in the end – referring the patient earlier and ending our misery sooner.

If you're seeking specific technical guidance for working with more complex or fragile patients, this book will not offer enough detail. But for those new to ISTDP, those of us who are looking for an accessible meta-understanding of the whole model, or supervisors guiding those of us who are, this book serves as a compassionate and useful guide to working with the core principles of ISTDP. Let's hope we get to see an English translation of the book sometime in the future.

Innføring i intensiv psykodynamisk korttidsterapi was published in Norwegian by Universitetsforlaget in 2023.