



Ten Essential Reads For Understanding Addiction and Mental Health Disorders in 2019

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As opioid addiction and mental disorders affect a rising number of Americans, there remains a pervasive, public stigma associated with both that can prevent those suffering from seeking much needed treatment. Stigma is often due to lack of understanding of these conditions, so it's more important than ever to actively seek clinically sound information to dispel harmful untruths and enrich our knowledge of these issues.

There are several brilliantly written books that offer sound insights into substance abuse, addiction and recovery efforts. While not an exhaustive list, my top ten must-read recommendations for 2019 offer resources on the science, treatment, and drivers of addiction and mental health for clinicians and general readers alike:



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This is a deeply comprehensive look at America's opioid crisis with important takeaways for readers looking to better understand the cultural impact and drivers of opioid addiction. This nicely complements *Dreamland*, by Sam Quinones, another favorite.

2. [Unbroken Brain: A Revolutionary New Way of Understanding Addiction](#), by Maia Szalavitz

I love Szalavitz's first-person account about her own experience of addiction treatment and am inspired by her transition from someone suffering from addiction to advocate. This book is compelling and rewarding in its perspective of addiction as a learning disorder rather than a character flaw.

3. [**Boundaries**](#), by Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend

While it's important to have a support network, Cloud and Townsend remind us that it's OK to say, "No," to attain a healthy, balanced lifestyle. The *New York Times* bestseller has resonated strongly with all kinds of readers, spawning a franchise of *Boundaries*-themed books, including *Boundaries Workbook*, *Boundaries in Marriage* and *Boundaries in Dating*, to name a few.

4. [**How To Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence**](#), by Michael Pollan

Don't let Pollan's food writing background fool you. In *How to Change Your Mind*, the *NYT* bestselling author distills cutting-edge research about the use of psychedelics for the treatment of people suffering from depression, addiction, and anxiety. There's a lot of provocative, forward-thinking information here, which is why I recommend this book to psychotherapy students.

5. [**Clean: Overcoming Addiction and Ending America's Greatest Tragedy**](#), by David Sheff

While you may be recently familiar with David Sheff's breathtaking narrative in *Beautiful Boy*, *Clean*'s journalistic approach to understanding addiction is no less compelling. There's useful, detailed information about addiction and treatment here that offers valuable insights sculpted with genuine humanity.

6. [**I Know This Much Is True**](#), by Wally Lamb

This novel paints an intimate story of twins, one with schizophrenia and one without, serving to expertly humanize diseases of the brain. Lamb's empathetic approach makes the book an engaging read for all that fosters much-needed understanding.

7. [**Drug Dealer, MD: How Doctors Were Duped, Patients Got Hooked, and Why It's So Hard to Stop**](#), by Anna Lembke

Lembke fills this critical look at the forces that drive addiction with detailed interviews of healthcare professionals, patients, insurance company executives, and others. In the process she paints a captivating portrait of addiction in the U.S. as a culture that favors medicine for quick fixes over healing. The book gives voice to millions of Americans struggling with addiction while examining the complex science and barriers behind rising rates of opioid

misuse.

8. [Why People Die By Suicide](#), by Thomas Joiner

Written by a leading expert on suicide, *Why People Die by Suicide* addresses the most troubling questions that family members struggle with after a loved one commits suicide, including the most pressing: Why? This collection of stories and statistics based on clinical and epidemiological evidence is essential to furthering understanding for all people who have been affected by suicide.

9. [The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma](#), by Bessel van der Kolk M.D.

Van der Kolk is a leading trauma expert, and here he presents the devastating impact that trauma plays on all aspects of human development. This is not niche subject matter; the number of Americans struggling with alcoholic and drug-addicted relatives is staggering, leaving in their wake an even higher number of total victims.

10. [Existential Psychotherapy](#), by Irvin Yalom

Widely considered among the psychiatrist's most influential books, Yalom has assembled a highly coherent work that connects four "ultimate concerns of life" — freedom, isolation, meaning/meaninglessness and death — and the conflicts that each play on human personality and psychopathology. This read is best suited for professionals in psychotherapy and psychiatry seeking an organized structure for the practice of existential therapy.

While the most well researched books can never replace the judgment of a trained mental health or addiction specialist, they do provide accessible and much-needed awareness to complement understanding of our growing healthcare crisis. What's on your reading list for this year?

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Ryan Hamptons book is a must read.

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