Book Review


This book was written to assist parents in dealing with difficulties commonly encountered by children. It is intended to acquaint parents with the symptoms of clinical depression and the various related depressive disorders, to provide them with the skills and insight necessary to deal with these symptoms at home, and to guide them in making the decision to seek appropriate treatment when necessary. The book is written in a straightforward and clear style to facilitate parents' comprehension of the information and offers specific examples, case illustrations, and step-by-step advice.

In the first three chapters, Shapiro acquaints the reader with the varying presentations of depressive phenomena and explains the symptoms associated with Adjustment Disorder with Depressed Mood, Dysthymia, Major Depression, Seasonal Affective Disorder, and Bipolar Disorder. She provides a brief historical account of the conceptualization and classification of affective disorders in youth and explores briefly the contributions from biological, genetic, psychosocial stress, psychodynamic, cognitive/behavioral, and family systems theories to our current understanding of depressive disorders in children and adolescents. Next, she provides an overview of and offers tips for coping with a number of factors which may contribute to a child's vulnerability to depression, including family vulnerabilities such as divorce, parental depression, loss, and abuse and neglect, as well as vulnerabilities within the child, such as the presence of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Conduct and Anxiety Disorders, chronic illness, disabilities, and learning, language, and academic difficulties.

In chapter 4, Shapiro provides a more detailed description of the depressed child, beginning in infancy and spanning the preschool and school-age years. She offers case illustrations of symptom presentation and possible causative factors, provides a list of warning signs for children of different ages, and offers advice on when and where to seek professional
help. Chapter 5 is dedicated to a description of the depressed teenager. Here, Shapiro discusses the signs and symptoms common in depressed adolescents and provides the parents with guidelines for determining whether certain behaviors are a cause for concern. She gives advice on communicating concern over potential depressive symptomatology to a teenager and provides information on where to seek help. She then provides a brief discussion on identifying and ensuring the safety of the suicidal adolescent. Further, she discusses developmental differences in the expression of depression in teenagers as compared to younger children, describes emotions many parents dealing with teenage children experience, and offers advice for handling these emotions effectively.

In chapter 6, she addresses the role of mental health and other service agencies in diagnosing and treating children and adolescents with depression. Further, she provides the reader with advice on preparing a child for consultation with a mental health professional and explains the difference between psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers in terms of educational background, qualifications and type of services offered by each. She describes a typical first encounter with a mental health professional and provides a list of issues to consider to ensure an appropriate fit between the needs of the child and family and the services available.

In chapter 7, Shapiro describes an integrative approach to the treatment of depression and encourages parents to seek a therapist who is flexible enough to address the many complex areas of the child’s life in developing a treatment plan. She orients the reader to the major psychotherapeutic approaches employed for the treatment of depression such as psychodynamic therapy, cognitive therapy, behavior therapy, and cognitive-behavioral therapy, and discusses the rationale and goals of each. She also describes the various treatment modalities, including individual, group, and family therapy, and discusses how and when each of these modalities may be appropriate and helpful. She also discusses the role of medication, identifying the various types of antidepressants and describing what parents may expect from each in terms of effectiveness and side effects. Finally, she acquaints the reader with issues salient to hospitalization, partial hospitalization, residential and day treatments, and home-based services.

Chapter 8 is devoted to the issue of suicide in children and adolescents. Shapiro discusses statistics on the prevalence of suicide and the factors which affect suicide statistics, including race and ethnicity, gender, exposure to suicide, and age, and the risk factors associated with suicide, including previous attempts, history of mental health care, recent loss, strong sense of personal failure, substance abuse, poor school performance, family history of psychiatric care or suicide attempt, repressive family atmosphere, family violence, family substance abuse, and the presence of a handgun in