Book Review


In Helping Your Depressed Teenager, Oster and Montgomery answer the basic questions asked by many concerned parents of an adolescent. They address the topic of how to know what is "normal" adolescent behavior and what indicators can signal when an adolescent is depressed that may require professional help. In addition, they offer advice for parents on how to talk to their adolescent children and how to get help when it becomes necessary. Brief explanations of various modes (individual, family, and drug therapy) and theories (cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic) of psychotherapy are given in order to enable parents to become knowledgeable consumers. All this is done in an easy-to-read and easy-to-understand format. The book is divided into three sections, the first covering typical adolescent development, the second covering depression and suicide in adolescence, and the third covering treatment considerations. Throughout, brief case examples are used to help illustrate the material, and an outline of "things to remember" is provided at the end of each chapter. In addition, an appendix contains listings of support groups and organizations serving adolescents and their families; suggestions for further reading are supplied as well.

In Chapter 1, the basic developmental milestones of teenagers are considered. The authors discuss the changes one experiences throughout adolescence. In doing so, they appear to speak from a systemic perspective, examining the changes in and forces exerted by intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal factors. Chapter 2 focuses specifically on this latter factor, examining the specific conditions associated with going through adolescence in today's society. Specifically, the authors discuss issues such as the increased need for achievement and the overcrowding of schools. However, in line with the first section's focus on typical development, they appropriately point out that most teenagers successfully maneuver through
the obstacles today just as in past years. This section concludes with a more
detailed discussion of adolescent development. The early and middle ado-
lescent years are covered and the difficulties parents and children usually
encounter during these years are explored. Further, a brief but candid dis-
cussion of the sexual concerns that are predominant in adolescence is
included.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide a definition of clinical depression and guide-
lines parents can use to tell if their child may be suffering from it. The
difference between this and normal feelings of depression is explained and
the changes in affect, behavior, and cognition that can serve as signals of
a significant difficulty are outlined. In addition, the authors explain that
comorbid conditions (e.g., anxiety disorders and attentional difficulties)
may often accompany a depressive episode. Moreover, in keeping with the
systemic perspective, the authors discuss the role of the family in precipi-
tating and maintaining a depressive episode in an adolescent and the
impact on the family when a family member becomes depressed. Chapters
7 and 8 deal specifically with suicide and suicidal behavior. First, statistics
regarding the prevalence of suicide and suicidal behaviors are presented.
The authors also provide a brief explanation of the different types of sui-
cidal behavior and the groups of youth most at risk. Further, they provide
some examples of findings from research investigating why youth attempt
suicide and devote a section to dispelling some of the myths surrounding
suicidal behavior. The last chapter in this section again focuses on the fam-
ily's role in depression and suicide. Specifically, biological and psychological
conditions that are hypothesized to be vulnerability factors are explicated.
Moreover, communication patterns are discussed and suggestions for im-
proving communication within the family by using open-ended questions
and reflective listening are given.

The final section is specifically for parents who have decided to seek
professional help for their adolescent. Chapter 10 explains how to find a
counselor or therapist. Suggestions are provided for questions that parents
may ask in order to make a decision about where to begin treatment. Im-
portantly, parents are given an idea of what to expect when they begin the
process of treatment. For example, general information about the types of
assessment that can be expected as well as the time involved are provided.
The authors also set up an expectation for parents that they can anticipate
being active participants in their child's therapy. Chapter 11 continues, ex-
plaining the qualities to look for in a therapist and the cognitive-behavioral
and psychodynamic approaches to therapy. A discussion about how to
speak with adolescents about therapy and suggestions for when an adoles-
cent is reluctant to enter treatment are provided. Chapter 12 again focuses
on the family, explaining family therapy as a possible component of a treat-