

Book Review

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Adolescent Depression: A Guide for Parents

by Francis Mark Mondimore, M.D. Johns Hopkins University Press,
Baltimore, Md., 2002, 304 pages, \$45.00.

This intelligently written book describes for lay individuals what depression is and how adolescents who suffer from depression can be helped. In the preface, Dr. Mondimore writes that he hopes to persuade parents that serious depression in adolescents is an illness, one that can be effectively treated. Parents who read the book will be persuaded this is the case.

Adolescent Depression is organized into 4 parts. The first—Symptoms, Syndromes, and Diagnosis—addresses the definitions of depression, differentiating symptoms from the syndrome. The author helps the reader by including clinical vignettes to illustrate the points he makes. He then uses phenomenology from the DSM (including defining what the DSM is) to underscore the differences in definitions and the importance of understanding that depression is indeed a real illness.

The author continues in Part 1 with the chapters “Normal Adolescence and Depression in Adolescence,” “The Mood Disorders of Adolescence,” and “Mood Disorders: A Summary of Diagnostic Categories in the DSM.” The diagnoses of major depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder, and bipolar disorder are discussed individually.

Part 2 addresses treatment and is heavily focused on medication with separate chapters on antidepressants and mood stabilizers and a chapter that reviews antipsychotic medications, benzodiazepines, St. John’s wort, omega-3 fatty acids and fish oil, and electroconvulsive therapy. Dr. Mondimore includes a chapter on how psychiatric medications work and gives a basic, but not simplistic, course in neuroscience. He includes diagrams and schematics of synapses and receptors that are clear and easy to follow, enhancing his writing.

The last chapter in Part 2 is “Counseling and Psychotherapy.” The author makes the cogent observation that most adolescents require 2 treaters: a psychiatrist who prescribes medication and a psychotherapist. Dr. Mondimore is pessimistic about the likelihood of finding a psychiatrist who has the time and training to do both. He describes the different kinds of psychotherapy available to adolescents, including family and group therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, interpersonal therapy, and insight-oriented therapy. Again, vignettes are interposed to give the reader greater understanding about what psychotherapy might be like.

Part 3 focuses on the symptomatology of related conditions that complicate the picture of adolescent depression including chapters on attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, alcohol and drug use, and eating disorders. The author writes nicely on diagnostic and treatment complexities of adolescent bipolar disorder and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. He has an additional chapter on self-destructive behavior, such as cutting, and on suicide. He concludes with a chapter on the genetics of mood disorders.

Part 4 is devoted to treatment. In line with the audience of this book, the author wisely calls this final section “Getting Better and Staying Well.” Chapters include strategies for successful treatment, the role of the family, planning for emergencies, and looking ahead. He correctly underscores the importance and difficulty in making the diagnosis, and that arriving at the best understanding of the adolescent’s problems may take multiple visits.

In conclusion, I heartily recommend this book to parents and relatives of adolescents who have or may have mood disorders. It is written clearly and simply, with a lens trained at a parent. Numerous clinical vignettes enliven the reading. The few charts and designs the author does use are helpful in delineating his point. The book is broad and well balanced in approach. Dr. Mondimore writes with a style that helps parents to understand the complexities of the problem that is optimistic of the likelihood of improvement with correct diagnosis and treatment. I recommend this book without reservation.

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