

## Book Reviews: I'm Not Alone and Finding My Way

Contributed by Jeanette TFW Pelton, LISW-S

Book reviews of I'm Not Alone and Finding My Way. Reviewed by Jeanette TFW Pelton.

Sherman, Michelle D., Ph.D., & Sherman, DeAnne. (2006). I'm not alone: A teen's guide to living with a parent who has a mental illness. Beaver Pond Press (<http://www.seedsofhopebooks.com>), 126 pages, \$20.

I'm Not Alone is specifically written for the teen who lives in the daily pain of a parent who has a mental illness. It is sensitively written; these authors very obviously know the teen mind. The book is fast moving and thorough in its three-part coverage of the subject. It is written with an eighth grade vocabulary in mind, but does not talk down to a high school student. The layout, illustrations, and print fonts give good variety and make it easy to read and attractive to teens, and it never gets "preachy." The writing reminds me of a friendly health class teacher--soothing, reassuring, and factual.

Section One draws the reader into the text, defining first those terrible terms they have had to live with in language that makes sense--depression, bipolar, and schizophrenia. I am disappointed that they chose to stay only within the confines of these three. I would have liked a definition of anxiety and borderline disorders. The book goes into descriptive definitions of self-medication and addiction and encourages teens to be part of the parent's treatment plan, to ask the questions they have of the therapists involved, and to not be afraid to speak up. I'm Not Alone is at once comforting and enabling to a teen. Yes, your parent is ill. No, you didn't make it happen. Yes, it could happen to anyone. And yes, you can still have a life. It answers questions teens in this predicament ask and gives answers that are satisfying and helpful. It takes the mystery out of the strong emotions that surround teens in this situation.

Section Two helps teens understand their own reactions to their parents' illness. It gives teens tools they can use in the rough times and offers suggestions on how to deal with their friends and the inevitable questions they will face at school. There are suggestions for how to be ready for the crises that come in the family and how to deal with the chaos that is mental illness. The book encourages them to first keep themselves safe, not to be afraid to call for help, and to steer clear if they are angry or appear to be losing control. I'm Not Alone helps them to realize they are important, too, and worthy of safety.

I especially liked the third section, which includes a resource list, activities to help a teen through the rough times, and a glossary of terms we adults throw around. It helps in forming questions that they can ask the experts. With ample places for teens to write their own conclusions and questions, I see this book as being particularly useful in a group setting--the exercises are simple and yet very searching in their scope. I would definitely feel it would be a good book to have as a resource and to share with teen clients.

Reviewed by Jeanette TFW Pelton, LISW-S, Senior Social Worker, Knox County Job and Family Services in Ohio, and private therapist with Mt. Vernon Psychological Associates.

Sherman, Michelle D., Ph.D., & Sherman, DeAnne. (2005). Finding my way: A teen's guide to living with a parent who has experienced trauma. Beaver Pond Press (<http://www.seedsofhopebooks.com>), 129 pages, \$20.

Finding My Way is an excellent tool for the therapist to use with a teen living in the post-trauma family. Divided into three sections, it assists the teen with understanding a typical person's reaction to trauma, and it helps them to see that their parent's reaction is not unusual. Section One defines Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in terms that teens can get their minds around. It breaks down the usual symptoms and helps them understand what is happening and what to expect. It takes away the mystery and gives them coping skills through exercises designed to help them understand that these strange reactions are all normal. No one is losing their mind, things can get better, and their parent still loves them.

It is comforting and enabling; without overtly doing so, it stresses the values that social workers all cherish--dignity, worth, self-determination, the value of human relationships--and yet never actually names them. Finding My Way gently leads readers down a path to understanding what is going on in their families. It is very well done.

Section Two takes teens beyond being victims and into being proactive in helping in their families. They lose the feeling of helplessness and move into practical actions they can take to help their families cope with the trauma aftermath. Teens learn to be supportive of their parents without becoming the parent. The book stresses safety and caring.

Finally, the wrap-up in Section Three brings it all together and includes a resource list, activities to help teens through the

rough times, and a glossary of terms. It puts commonly asked questions into a concise form. As in other books by these authors, there are ample spaces for readers to write their own thoughts and feelings, to help them analyze what they are going through.

I feel this book could be a great help to anyone who works with teens. At some time, you will come into contact with a teen who has a PTSD experience or who has a family member going through PTSD. This book will open the conversation and help keep it going until real healing takes over. I would highly recommend that it be on your professional bookshelf.

Reviewed by Jeanette TFW Pelton, LISW-S, Senior Social Worker, Knox County Job and Family Services in Ohio, and private therapist with Mt. Vernon Psychological Associates.