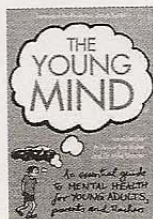


This issue we review three titles: an inclusive introduction to children's mental health; a damning critique of the state's role in parenting; and a illustrated booklet aimed at young people offering advice about health and emotional wellbeing



The Young Mind

co-edited by
Sue Bailey and
Mike Shooter
Bantam Press, 2009
£11.99

This book succeeds in achieving what it sets out to do. It informs members of the lay public about young minds and it empowers them to find a way through the often perplexing times of childhood and adolescence. It is a very useful handbook and many professionals too could well do with it by their bedsides.

The book has many virtues. Its chapters are short, its case illustrations are clear and its bullet points, tips and references, handy. Above all, its language is direct and straightforward. There is no difficulty reading through its many pages as it moves from child development and parental and school issues through the wide range of serious disorders to, in the end, treatments and therapies.

It is inevitable that a book of this kind should draw the charge that it oversimplifies the complexity of its subject matter. For sure, it carries a spirited kind of positivism that doesn't always square with the severity of the mental health problems it describes. Also, there is an abiding faith in building people's coping skills and in promoting cognitive behaviour therapy as the solution to pretty well everything. All very fine, but at what cost to the feelings, emotions and enduring conflicts that so often underlay the persistence of many problems?

Most of the chapters are written by doctors; its editors commissioned by The Royal College of Psychiatrists. This adds a sense of authority and coherence. However, as is now well understood, the mental health of the young is everyone's business and to this extent, the book's uni-disciplinary emphasis is a limitation. But this does not take away its value. The clinical judgements of all the contributors are sound, their views on medication well measured and their writing uncluttered by jargon. — PETER WILSON

*Review first appeared in *Mental Health Today*



Up Front

Clare Eastland; illustrations
by Chris Wakefield
Southgate Publishers and
The Campaign for Learning
2009

As an 18 year old having been in the CAMH system for many years, I have certainly seen my share of 'wellbeing booklets' or, in some cases, poor attempts at them. Although I have criticisms of it the *Up Front* booklet produced for Worcestershire Council does not fall within this latter category.

For me, the most impressive aspect of the booklet is in its comprehensiveness. It tackles all of the key issues facing young people at the moment, a few of which are not issues that affect everyone, but which are still important to have knowledge and awareness about.

The booklet itself is brightly coloured, with bold graphics on each page, in an attempt to engage the teenage reader. I often found myself anticipating what was coming next with a familiar feeling.

The format of the booklet shows one column of text on the right side of the page, while the remaining area is used to illustrate stereotypes, and often dangers, through caricatures which are continued throughout the leaflet. It's in the 'cartoon with speech bubble' format that I often felt patronised and at some points offended by the messages conveyed by these "characters". The use of stereotypes can be effective when used appropriately, but in an attempt to connect with the 14-19 target age range, it feels as though they have not afforded some of the topics the sensitivity they deserve. This can be seen in the 'Feeling low' section, where one character uses a "piece of glass" to see the world in a more positive light.

Having said this, in most cases, the information provided in the columns is appropriate and effective. It appeals to the reader on a realistic level. I particularly liked the 'Setting goals' section towards the end, which is something I've not seen in a booklet of this kind before. — BEJAL PATEL



Standing Up to Super Nanny

Jennie Bristow
Imprint Academic
£8.95

Next to their adolescent offspring, parents have become one of the most vilified groups. If the children go wrong then, ipso facto, it must be the parents' fault. Hence the arsenal of parenting orders, contracts and fines which now arm the police and local authorities. So widespread is the parenting malaise believed to be that the Family and Parenting Institute was followed a couple of years ago by the National Academy of Parenting Practitioners.

The term "academy" lends a spurious academic, even scientific respectability to the idea of parenting, something which Jennie Bristow and her fellow writers curiously overlook in this counter-blast to the parenting culture. Yet this worryingly absurd idea became so insidious that, as Bristow et al suggest, it has sapped parents' confidence, making them too hopeful of wholly unrealistic outcomes.

This is not to say that parenting is easy or anxiety-free, as any parent knows, but there is a strongly, much over-looked instinctive element to it. That is not to say it is something that can easily be done without support from friends and family. Support from professionals needs to be just that and not instruction to fit parents into an artificial pattern of behaviour.

Bristow and colleagues rightly see the means to correct alleged failures of parents as often a diversion from tackling poverty and there is a thought provoking critique of Sure Start in that respect. The authors are prejudiced against health visitors, social workers and "other official wolf-in-sheep's clothing" and I dislike their throwaway dismissive remarks about drinking in pregnancy and child obesity.

If parenting were a science we would have cracked it long ago and it would not allow for the fact that good parents can produce awful and disturbed children or that children of the same parents can be vastly different. — TERRY PHILPOT