

From Surviving to Thriving Promoting Mental Health in Young People

Andrew Fuller

ACER Press, 1998

This book provides a very readable and accessible Australian text which assembles many of the theories and empirical research conducted in relation to the developmental phase of adolescence, with a particular focus upon promoting mental well being in young people. There is a very appropriate distinction made between the sub-developmental stages of early adolescence, middle adolescence, and late adolescence. These distinctions have become more important as the entry into adolescence appears to commence sooner, while the attainment of full independence through employment and independent living occurs later, thus extending this phase for a period of time longer than ever before in history.

One of the strengths of the book is the placement of troubled adolescents within their normal developmental context. All too often young people with problematic behaviour are assessed without recognition of the developmental challenges that young people in the age group universally face, regardless of adversity and inter-familial dynamics and stressors. This perspective acts to normalise rather than pathologise troubled young people. There is an emphasis on the work of Catalano and others in relation to the notions of risk and resilience, concepts which have been embraced by the Department of Human Services in Victoria in its work with high risk adolescents. There is also the provision of useful approaches to communicating and engaging with young people, as well as strategies for working with families and parents. There is an appropriate emphasis adopted in relation to high risk behaviours that professionals need to be alerted to, as part of their duty of care responsibilities, such as suicidal ideation and intent; anger, bullying and violence; self harm and school refusal; and problematic use of substances. These high risk behaviours are all linked to the underlying issues of mental well being and mental health, the predominant theme adopted for the text.

The book provides a range of materials to augment the text in order to engage the reader, spanning profiles, surveys and charts; guided questions and tips; research data presented graphically; and summaries of key considerations. This presentation format enhances the readability of the book, and provides a variety of learning materials to suit a potentially wide audience. The book is thus highly 'user friendly' and

should be attractive to the diversity of the reading audience. The title is also very appealing, capturing the fundamental challenge facing those who work with troubled young people, in moving them from sub-optimal functioning to productive and fulfilling lives.

The Introduction to this book indicates that it is written for professionals working with young people from middle primary years to early adulthood. The range of professionals suggested as an audience include school support workers, social workers, child protection workers, psychologists, therapists, teachers, and year level co-ordinators. Despite the view adopted by the reviewer that the material included is all relevant, well assembled, thorough and accurate, there is concern that for some of the professional groups mentioned above it may be targeted at an elementary or entry level. Given the breadth and complexity of the issues covered in the text, and the plethora and depth of theories developed in the arena, it is inevitable that for many professionals the book will not introduce new content, or extend existing knowledge considerably. Yet for professionals studying or newly graduated in fields concerned with troubled young people, the book should provide an invaluable basis for undertaking more complex and advanced reading. It is also positive to find the text located in the Australian context, which again should provide a foundation for more advanced reading which mainly emanates from the United States and the United Kingdom.

This book thus provides a valuable addition to the Australian material on working with young people who may develop problematic behaviour, and is timely in its release in relation to the development of new Government initiatives at both the preventative end within schools, and at the tertiary end with high risk adolescent initiatives.

Reviewed by:

Anne Markiewicz
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The Australian Baby and Child Care Handbook

Carol Fallows

Penguin Books, 1998, 394 pp.

This book has been written by the editor of an Australian magazine, *Australia's Parents*, who has had extensive experience writing on child care issues. Her material and ideas have been collected from years of reading, writing and editing child care and development literature as well as her

own experience as a parent.

The content and style of this book reflects this journalistic approach to the subject. It is well structured, easy to read with text, pictures, detailed charts and diagrams displayed in a

way which should entice the reader and maintain their interest.

The book covers the spectrum from conception to when a child commences school. The range of topics is enormous with subjects extending from preparing for babies on a budget, coping with the fussy eater, sibling rivalry to what parents can read to their toddler. Some particular sections of interest include an A-Z of children's injuries, illnesses, how to give a baby massage and a resource section for readers who would like to obtain more specific information. There is even a page suggesting six simple games to play with your baby, including the words to the nursery rhyme 'weency, weency spider'!

However, this book is not a publication for the professional worker in the child care field who may require more specialised knowledge and more detailed reference to the sources of the data provided.

It is definitely targeted at new parents who would find this child care manual of particular interest. It starts from the premise that the reader knows very little about child care and

development and its commonsense approach is not intimidating. It does not assume that everyone has unlimited financial resources so its suggestions for food, play and equipment includes cheap but effective alternatives.

This book is not limited to the growing child, but highlights the needs of parents for sleep, support and outside involvement. There is a section which discusses the option of becoming a working parent, plus references to single parenting and the role of older children to help out.

It would be a welcome addition to the armoury of apparatus of expectant parents and a good resource for professionals to recommend to their clients.

Reviewed by:

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Adolescents at risk : Who cares?

Practice Exchange presented by CAFWAA

In early November 1998, the Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia (CAFWAA) auspiced the first national Practice Exchange for adolescents with high support needs. The Exchange attracted 140 delegates from all over Australia to Rydges Resort, Eagle Hawk Hill, a bushland resort just north of Canberra, for three days of lively discussion, stimulating presentations and the sharing of ideas and current initiatives. It was entitled *Adolescents at risk - who cares?*

Keynote speakers were Robin Clark, well known for her consultancy work in substitute care; Frank Ainsworth, internationally recognised for his conceptual work on child welfare issues; Danni Melidio, consultant and trainer of youth and social welfare workers; and David Matthews, Executive Officer of the Australian Youth and Policy Action Coalition. Both Danni and David brought a unique perspective to the discussions as they have both experienced the substitute care system first hand.

Highlights of the Practice Exchange were the two panel discussions which explored the issues:

- Is there a place for secure welfare?
- Is there a place for coercion in behaviour management?

These discussions provided a forum for participants to challenge the accepted thinking and explore new possibilities.

Vicki Brown
Practice Exchange Organiser
CAFWAA Committee