



**WHY IS
MY TEENAGER
FEELING LIKE
THIS?**

*A Guide
for Helping Teens through
Anxiety & Depression*

DAVID MURRAY

“In a day and age when many parents, even Christian ones, feel as though they are ill-equipped to parent their children facing all sorts of issues, along comes David Murray to give us a powerful parental tool in shepherding our children who battle anxiety and depression. With this book (and the accompanying student version), parents no longer have to be or feel ill-prepared to navigate such overwhelming issues. I just wish I had this book years ago.”

Ed Stetzer, Executive Director, Billy Graham Center for Evangelism,
Wheaton College

“Parenting is good for our prayer lives, we find, especially when sons and daughters are navigating the many anxieties that seem to coincide with the teenage years. David Murray has the practical experience and spiritual wisdom to help. Based in biblical truth and at the same time sensitive to the psychological and physiological complexities of human emotions, Murray’s companion guides tell real-life stories that empower teens and their parents to understand their feelings, care well for one another, and take concrete steps toward healing together.”

Phil and Lisa Ryken, President, Wheaton College, and his wife, Lisa

“In this book, David Murray comes alongside parents who may be willfully naive about or find themselves completely overwhelmed by how to help their child deal with depression, offering understandable explanations of the issues and equipping them for important conversations.”

Nancy Guthrie, Bible teacher; author, *Even Better than Eden*

“Parents are the most influential and important individuals in their teenager’s life. But often parents struggle because they don’t understand what their teen is feeling. This can be especially true of parents of teens dealing with anxiety and depression. In *Why Is My Teenager Feeling Like This?*, Murray provides a remarkable resource for those parents. Thoroughly researched and filled with practical, biblical strategies, this is an absolute must-read for parents who want to help their struggling teen more effectively.”

Jaquelle Crowe Ferris, Founder and COO, The Young Writer; author, *This Changes Everything*

“Parenting a teen who is riddled with anxiety or depression can be a daunting and overwhelming journey. Parents are often plagued by questions: *How did this happen? Did I cause this? Has God abandoned us?* In his compelling resource for parents, *Why Is My Teenager Feeling Like This?*, David Murray restores hope by providing both practical insight and meaningful strategies that promote healthy change. This is a must-read for parents navigating the darkness of depression or anxiety!”

Emilie DeYoung, Supervisor for Child and Adolescent Counseling, Family Wellness Center, Zeeland, Michigan

“With anxiety and depression at an all-time high in today’s teens, this book could not come at a more crucial time. As someone who battled anxiety and depression as a teen and now navigates it with her own child, I found *Why Is My Teenager Feeling Like This?* to be an extremely practical, helpful, biblical, and hopeful book. Rather than giving spiritually cliché answers to a complex and multilayered issue, David Murray compassionately walks alongside hurting and overwhelmed parents, offering clarity, understanding, and wise counsel in how to better understand their teens’ unique battles with anxiety and depression, as well as providing the practical and spiritual tools to support them through it. Whether you have a teen or want to prepare for the teen years, this book is a must-read. And you never know, you might even see yourself in these pages and find a path toward your own healing along the way.”

Sarah Walton, coauthor, *Hope When It Hurts* and *Together through the Storms*

“This book has opened our eyes to the real nature of our son’s struggle with anxiety and depression. It has helped us to communicate with him more effectively, empathize more lovingly, and turn our hearts from criticism to encouragement and understanding. It has made a difference in our relationship with our son, our family, and, most importantly, with Christ! The practical exercises not only helped our son but are also making an impact in our own lives as well. If you have a child who is fighting for hope, meaning, and relief from the death grip of anxiety and depression, we highly recommend this book!”

Layne and Tanya, parents of a teenager

“I wish I had this book when I first entered youth ministry. David Murray’s discussion of who gets anxiety and depression, what causes these feelings, and what we can do to help teens we care about is compassionate, insightful, and tremendously helpful. His extensive list of tools to help teens toward healing is excellent, but his advice on how to partner with teens and how to walk alongside them in the process is what makes this book so valuable. *Why Is My Teenager Feeling Like This?* offered insights into my own moments of anxiety while also giving me practical wisdom for caring for teens.”

Christopher Walker, Associate Pastor for Youth Ministry, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Lancaster Pennsylvania

“Whether you are unfamiliar or well-acquainted with anxiety and depression, David Murray’s *Why Is My Teenager Feeling Like This?* will equip you with practical tools and theological truth as you shepherd your teen. I know I will return to this book when I’m anxious or when I need to support a loved one who is. Highly recommend it!”

Kristen Wetherell, author, *Fight Your Fears*; coauthor, *Hope When It Hurts*

“In these days of rising anxiety and depression, parents of teenagers need an accessible, empathetic, and wise guide. David Murray’s books team up to provide parents and teens with a way to communicate hope and give grace to one another in these perplexing struggles. Pastors and youth workers will find in Murray a patient and seasoned coach in their efforts to care for anxious and depressed teens and their parents.”

David Sunday, Lead Pastor, New Covenant Bible Church, St. Charles, Illinois

**WHY IS MY
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FEELING
LIKE THIS?**

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Why Am I Feeling Like This? A Teen's Guide to Freedom from Anxiety and Depression

WHY IS MY TEENAGER FEELING LIKE THIS?

A Guide for Helping Teens through
Anxiety and Depression

David Murray

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
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This book is dedicated to all Christians who give their time and hearts to counseling struggling teens. May God bless your faithful and loving service.

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Introduction

WHY IS MY TEENAGER FEELING LIKE THIS?

Why is my teenager feeling like this? Have you ever looked at your adolescent son or daughter and asked this question? You poured your life into your children. You provided for them in every way. You set them up for success. But now they are sinking. They can't get out of bed. They don't want to go to school. They can't function. They spend hours locked in their bedroom. They are nervous wrecks. This was not what you dreamed of. Instead of a confident, independent, happy, hopeful young man or woman, you now see a depressed, anxious, and empty soul.

Why is my teenager feeling like this? What went wrong? And what can I do about it? These are the questions that this book will answer. I wrote it to accompany *Why Am I Feeling Like This?: A Teen's Guide to Freedom from Anxiety and Depression*. As teens read that book, I hope parents (and teachers and pastors) will read this book alongside them. Rarely will teens recover from anxiety or depression without adult help. The adults closest to them have a vital role to play, and this guide will help parents and adult mentors minister to hurting teens.

Three Differences

This book differs from the teen book in three main ways. First, it provides more advanced information about teen anxiety and

depression, the kind of information that would have made the teen book too long and complicated.

Second, it contains three extra sections at the beginning to help you understand anxiety and depression better: “Who Gets Anxiety and Depression?”; “What Causes Anxiety and Depression?”; and “What Can We Do About Anxiety and Depression?”

Third, and most importantly, this book gives spiritual encouragement and practical direction for parents and other adults who want to help but don’t know what to do. It will show how much you can contribute, and how many resources for healing God has placed in the hands of his people. Yes, there is hope in the midst of despair.

Working Together

Apart from the extra sections at the beginning, the adult book follows the same structure as the teen book. This makes working together a lot easier. There is some overlapping content in the two books, maybe about 5 percent, but the vast majority of this book is new content tailored for parents and other adult mentors. You can therefore read this book as a stand-alone, but I recommend that you read the teen book as well if you want to provide the most help for your teen.

There are two ways of working with your teens. First, and ideally, you can do it in a structured way. You set up a time, say fifteen to thirty minutes every few days or every week, to discuss the book a chapter at a time, and go over the verses, prayers, and questions together. You can ask them to comment on what they learned from their book, and you can share what you learned from your book.

Although this is the ideal, as we know, teens don’t always conform to ideals—which brings us to the second, more informal approach. You get both books and ask your teen to read his while you read yours. But you don’t set up times and sessions for discussion. You simply try to understand and help your teen more casually and try to talk as opportunity arises. You will be growing

in knowledge and usefulness as you read, but you are really at your teen's mercy as to how much input he allows you to give. His book encourages him to involve his parents or an adult mentor, so hopefully he will eventually drop his defenses and let you in.¹

If he won't read his book or engage with you at all, it's going to be more difficult to make progress, but if you read both books, you'll be able to understand your teen better and also help him in practical and spiritual ways, perhaps without him realizing it.

Team Members

In addition to your own involvement, I encourage you to add other team members as finances and opportunity allow. For example, you might want to involve your doctor, your pastor, a Christian or biblical counselor, or a mental health professional. Depending on the severity of the depression or anxiety, your teen may need the more specialized help a doctor or another specialist can provide or put you in touch with. If you think your teen has suicidal thoughts, you must act immediately and get outside help. Look out for phrases such as:

“I want out.”

“There's no reason to live.”

“I'm done with life.”

“I can't take the pain any longer.”

“Everyone would be better off without me.”

At the very worst, remember there is a National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, available twenty-four hours a day, every day: 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Who Gets Anxiety and Depression?

If you are a parent of an anxious or depressed teen, you might feel as alone as your child does. Like your teen, you feel there's

1. You will notice that I have switched between male and female pronouns throughout the book, because what you learn will apply to both boys and girls.

no one else in this situation. You might even have decided you've failed as a parent. Why is my son or daughter like this when all my friends' kids are fine and flourishing? What have I done wrong?

If you're a pastor or teacher, you will have more experience of anxious teens, but you probably still feel confused about it. You can't figure it out. Sometimes the kids you least expect suffer in this way. Why? If we want to help our teens, we have to start by understanding who gets anxiety and depression.

TEEN ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IS COMMON

Many anxious teens will feel as if they are completely weird, that no one else is like them or understands them. They look around at their peers and can't imagine anyone else their age feeling like they do. They see the carefully curated social media images of perfect, happy, and confident classmates and conclude that they are the odd one out. Ashamed and embarrassed, they withdraw from friends, family, and social occasions, to suffer alone in lonely isolation. "I'm just weird," they conclude.

One of the best things we can do for our teens is to explain to them that many teens suffer in the same way. Despite what the social media feeds communicate, the reality is that teen anxiety is at epidemic levels, so much so that it is now the most common issue for which teens seek counseling.

- Nearly a third of thirteen- to seventeen-year-olds will experience an anxiety disorder (38 percent of girls and 26 percent of boys).²
- An estimated six million American teens presently have some kind of anxiety disorder, although the number is probably higher because the majority do not seek treatment.³

2. "Anxiety Disorder Definitions," National Institute of Mental Health, 2017, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/any-anxiety-disorder.shtml>.

3. Corrie Cutrer, "Why Are Our Children So Anxious?" *Christianity Today*, January 6, 2017, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2017/january/parenting-in-age-of-anxiety-children-teens.html>.

- Fifty-four percent of college students surveyed said that they had “felt overwhelming anxiety” in the past twelve months.⁴
- In 2011, 11 percent of teen girls had a major depressive episode in the past year. By 2017, that number had risen to 20 percent.⁵
- While the depression rate for boys has risen more slowly, the suicide rate has spiked to a thirty-year high.⁶

Anecdotal evidence backs up the statistics. One female Christian counselor recently described how, when she first started counseling twenty-four years ago, “Probably one out of every twenty kids coming in were dealing with anxiety. . . . Now, out of my new appointments, I would say at least sixteen of every twenty families are here for that reason, if not more.”⁷

It’s not just common in our culture, it’s also common in the Bible. Even strong and mature Bible characters such as King David and the Apostle Paul battled worry, anxiety, and fear (Ps. 56:3; 2 Cor. 7:5; 1:8). The most common command in the Bible is “Fear not!” which means it must be a very common problem.

TEEN ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION OFTEN COME TOGETHER

You might be wondering why one book would try to deal with both anxiety and depression. Aren’t they different problems? While there are differences, many experts now view them as two sides of the one coin, or two faces of the one basic problem. Yes, someone can be depressed but not anxious, or anxious without being depressed, but about 50 percent of teens who have one also have the other, to some degree.

4. Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, “The Coddling of the American Mind,” *The Atlantic*, September 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/>.

5. “Major Depression,” National Institute of Mental Health, February 2019, https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/major-depression.shtml#part_155031.

6. Markham Heid, “Depression and Suicide Rates Are Rising Sharply in Young Americans, New Report Says. This May Be One Reason Why,” *Time*, March 14, 2019, <https://time.com/5550803/depression-suicide-rates-youth/>.

7. Corrie Cutrer, “Why Are Our Children So Anxious?,” *Christianity Today*, January 6, 2017, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2017/january/parenting-in-age-of-anxiety-children-teens.html>.

When it comes to depression, 13 percent of twelve- to seventeen-year-olds experience major depression in any one year, with depression affecting about 20 percent of adolescents by the time they become adults. That's every fifth teen in your child's class.

We also find biblical figures who experienced depression. Look at how depressed the psalmists were in Psalms 32 and 88, how depressed Elijah was at the lowest point of his ministry (1 Kings 19:1–8), and how Job slipped into depression at various times (Job 3:11–15; 30:16–26).

As anxiety is more common than depression for teens, and it usually comes before depression, the primary focus of this book will be anxiety. However, most of the remedies work for both anxiety and depression, as we will see.

TEEN ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ARE NORMAL

Apart from using statistics and the Bible to assure teens that anxiety and depression are common, one of the best ways we can “normalize” these problems is to talk about mental illness and other emotional disorders as common experiences in a fallen world. Speak about it around the supper table or in the car. If we are teachers or preachers, we can talk about it in the classroom, in the pulpit, or at youth groups. Look out for long-term changes in your teen's behavior and moods and take opportunities to ask her what's going on in her thoughts and feelings. You could say, for example, “You seem to be a bit down or troubled. Can I help in any way?” To maximize the chances of your teen opening up to you, try not to come across as judgmental, critical, or scared.

Only one thing is worse than never talking about such disorders, and that is to mock, shame, or stigmatize those who suffer with them. Such a cruel and arrogant attitude will ensure that our teens will never talk to us about these challenges or seek our help. They will either bottle it up and suffer in silence, or else they will seek help from others outside of the Christian community, who may lead them astray. At worst, they may start cutting

themselves to find temporary relief, or even attempt suicide as a permanent solution.

Instead, in our homes, our schools, and our churches, we want to talk about these issues as normal abnormalities in an abnormal world. We want to build a culture of transparency and trust so that our teens will feel free and safe to talk about their fears without fear. Anxiety and depression are simply two of the many consequences of the fall, and teens should be able to talk about them just as we talk about asthma, broken arms, disrespect, purity, and so on.

TEEN ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ARE VARIED

We must avoid stereotypes of anxiety and depression because they actually can manifest themselves in multiple ways. Just because we or someone else we know suffered in a certain way does not mean that everyone experiences it in that way.

There are many kinds of anxiety. The most common are panic disorder, specific phobias, generalized anxiety disorder, and social anxiety disorder.⁸ Some anxiety (and depression) is genetic, sometimes it is a response to trauma, and sometimes it is caused by exhaustion or perfectionism. Some of these disorders are long-term but low-grade. Other times they are brief but acute. They make some kids withdraw and others aggressive. Sometimes it is the result of guilt—both true and false guilt. Nervous kids get it, but so do hyperconfident kids. Girls get it, and so do boys; although more girls admit it than boys. Help your teen identify their unique symptoms of anxiety—physical, spiritual, emotional, mental—so they can recognize it in the future.

It's important to appreciate the variety and diversity of anxiety and depression, because if we have a set but limited caricature of an anxious person, we could miss it or respond to it wrongly. This

8. "Anxiety Disorders," National Alliance on Mental Illness, March 2015, <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Images/FactSheets/Anxiety-Disorders-FS.pdf>; "Anxiety Disorders," National Institute of Mental Health, July 2018, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml>; "Facts and Statistics," Anxiety and Depression Association of America, <https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>; "Symptom Checker," Child Mind Institute, 2019, <https://childmind.org/symptomchecker/>; "Anxiety Basics," Child Mind Institute, 2019, <https://childmind.org/guide/anxiety-basics/>.

is why it's important to get experienced professionals like doctors and trained counselors involved in diagnosing these disorders.

TEEN ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ARE TERRIBLE

Imagine that you are driving your family to church, and you suddenly hit black ice, spin out of control, and start heading toward a precipice. Your fight-or-flight system is firing on all cylinders. You're sweating, your heart is pounding, your muscles are tensed, your insides are doing somersaults, and you know you are about to die.

But, by God's grace, your vehicle stops just before going over the cliff. You are safe but shaking uncontrollably; your guts are a mess, you can hardly string two words together, you want to cry or even scream.

That's what anxiety is like for many of our teens. You will calm down an hour or so after your brush with death, and eventually the memory of the black ice will fade. But for anxious teens, it's like they are heading toward the precipice twenty-four hours a day. That's how terrible and terrifying this can be for them. It's as horrifyingly real to them as you heading toward the cliff. Try to remember that when you are talking with them. Or look up the hashtag #thisiswhatanxietyfeelslike on Twitter to sample some of the raw descriptions that people have submitted.⁹

Depression is no better, and often is worse. Imagine the sadness you would feel if one of your loved ones died. That can be the level of pain in depression, often with no hope of alleviation. In 2016 the demographic with the highest increase in rate of suicide was ten- to fourteen-year-old girls, for whom the rate tripled.¹⁰ Again, look up the hashtag #thisiswhatdepressionfeelslike for more graphic descriptions.

TEEN ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ARE TREATABLE

One of the most encouraging aspects of teen anxiety is that although it is so common, varied, and terrible, it is also one of the

9. Also, see Sharon Horesh Bergquist, "How Stress Affects Your Body," TED-Ed video, October 22, 2015, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1Z5-oPtU>.

10. "Suicide Rates Rising Across the U.S.," CDC website, June 7, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2018/p0607-suicide-prevention.html>.

most treatable mental or emotional disorders. That's why it's so tragic that a 2015 report from the Child Mind Institute found that only about 20 percent of young people with a diagnosable anxiety disorder get treatment.¹¹ Depression is more stubborn to remove, but, as this book will remind you, there's still much that can be done. God has provided many ways to heal these agonies or help your teen to manage and handle them better.

As parents, pastors, teachers, and counselors, we have a great opportunity to reach out to our suffering teens and help them access help, as well as play a role in providing help ourselves. One of the first steps in becoming a resource for our suffering teens is understanding what's actually happening in these disorders.

What Causes Anxiety and Depression?

When there's been a public tragedy like a building collapse or a flood, people often demand an investigation. The government responds by appointing an investigator to report on the causes of the disaster, a process that can take some time. Similarly, although we live in a day of instant fixes and we may be impatient to get to solutions for our teens, it's essential to pause in this chapter and consider the causes of anxiety and depression.

IDENTIFYING CAUSES IS IMPORTANT

Trying to identify the causes behind anxiety and depression is important for four reasons. First, *it relieves frustration*. You and your teen may be totally baffled as to why she feels the way she does. From the outside, her life looks fine. So why should her life be such a mess on the inside? It's frustrating because, as human beings, we are used to looking for a cause behind every effect. When we finally see it, we get it, we understand. Similarly, if we can find the causes of anxiety and depression, the frustration over what seemed to be irrational and mysterious will be reduced and relieved.

11. Susanna Schrobsdorff, "Teen Depression and Anxiety: Why the Kids Are Not Alright," *Time*, October 27, 2016, <http://time.com/4547322/american-teens-anxious-depressed-overwhelmed/>.

Second, *it increases sympathy*. When we can't figure out why our teens feel so bad, we can get impatient and critical of them. Are they just making it up? But when we identify a cause, we begin to understand why they may be feeling and acting in this way. They're not just imagining things. There's a real cause with a real effect. We then begin to feel much more sympathy.

Third, *it improves communication*. Ignorance, suspicion, frustration, and criticism shut down communication. Therefore, when we get knowledge, understanding, and sympathy, communication begins to flow again. Our teens feel accepted and loved and will trust us enough to talk to us without fearing rejection or condemnation. This is such a central element of healing for our teens.

Fourth, *it gets to the roots*. If we treat only symptoms, we will never provide deep and lasting healing. It's like chopping the top off garden weeds. They will grow back again eventually. But identifying and dealing with causes deals with the roots, and hopefully results in permanent removal and change.

IDENTIFYING CAUSES REQUIRES PATIENCE

The teen book is structured around stories of teen depression and anxiety. I deliberately chose the narrative approach there because it is the most likely to appeal to teens. They can identify with the characters and better engage with the material. The majority of this book is also structured around the same characters, although the content is intended to assist adults. However, because it can be helpful for adults to see the causes of anxiety and depression in a more systematic and tabulated form, I've provided the following table.

Causes can be divided into four main categories, but there are a number of causes in each of these categories. Therefore, it may take time to determine exactly where the anxiety or depression is coming from. There's a lot to explore, and often more than one cause is in play. But however long it takes, we must take time in this phase to ensure that we—and our teens—are not jumping to premature conclusions.

Causes of Anxiety and Depression

Spiritual Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wrong view of God or the gospel• Lack of Bible knowledge• Unbelief• Sin and unresolved guilt• Prayerlessness• Backsliding• Pornography• Discontent and ingratitude• Satanic attack
Physical Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Malfunctioning biological system• Lack of exercise• Lack of rest and sleep• Poor diet• Abuse• Long-term stress and tension• Workaholism
Relational Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bullying• Identity theft• Perfectionism• Excessive expectations• Family breakdown• Conflict with parents• Friend drama• Bereavement• Social fear
Mental/Cognitive Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information overload• Social media• Overactive imagination• Unresolved problems• PTSD• False thinking patterns

I don't recommend sitting down with teens and interrogating them with this checklist of causes in your hand. It's better to engage in conversation with them, and ideally do more listening than talking. If they are reading their book, ask them if they identified with any of the characters, and maybe if there was more than one. Use this table more as a mental checklist.

Perhaps help them to keep an anxiety log for a few weeks, which records anxiety and depression occurrences—when and where, and what thoughts and feelings they had. Perhaps also record times of joy and peace. Then look for any patterns and lessons.

Anxious teens will often identify the physical causes first because so much of the experience of anxiety is physical. However, we need to explore the spiritual, relational, and cognitive or mental realms as well. While physical symptoms may be the primary manifestation of anxiety, the underlying causes will often be in one of the other realms. This is where involving a counselor with experience and skill is helpful, especially if you can't get your teen to talk to you.

IDENTIFYING CAUSES INVOLVES OPENNESS

If we come to people with our minds already made up about why they are anxious or why they should not be depressed, then we will not listen well or be sensitive to helpful hints in their words and actions. Our teen may have closed his mind to possibilities or be reluctant to talk about certain areas of his life. We will be more likely to get to the bottom of their issues if we all approach the problem with open minds. That means we must avoid assuming the problem is all spiritual, all physical, all mental, or all relational.

It also means we have to be aware that causes can come from more than one category. While I've tried to distinguish the four realms of causes, obviously there's overlap between them. God made us in such a way that our souls, bodies, thoughts, and feelings all affect each other. Indeed, in many cases a mixture of all four realms in different proportions is at the root of our teen's anxiety and depression. We must avoid oversimplifying.

IDENTIFYING CAUSES CAN BE PAINFUL

Sometimes a discussion of causes may reveal things that will bring us great pain as parents. We may uncover terrible sins or abuse in our teens' lives that shock and horrify us. We may discover that things we have done and said, or left undone and unsaid, have contributed to their suffering. Maybe we will see how our decisions or neglect have damaged our children. We might realize that our teens are actually not Christians after all and are desperately lost. We might have to face facts about ourselves and them that we have been trying to ignore or run away from.

If we are part of the problem, then confessing our sins to our teens and asking for forgiveness is an essential step in the process. We may not be to blame for everything, but insofar as we are, then we must take responsibility and follow the gospel pattern, however painful that may be to us. Our teens will never fully heal unless we truly confess and seek their forgiveness.

If we discover things we did not know before, such as bullying, pornography, self-harm, obsessive compulsive behavior, and so on, then it's important that we don't express shock, disgust, or self-pity. We must try to be unshockable and avoid turning the focus on ourselves.

Avoid language such as "I'm shocked at you"; "How could you do this to me?"; "I am so disappointed"; "If you were a Christian you wouldn't feel this or do this." If we want to be part of the solution, we need to keep the focus on their healing, not our offense or our disappointment. However painful it may feel to you, remember that their pain is far worse.

What Can We Do about Anxiety and Depression?

We've looked at who gets anxiety and depression and what causes them. We now want to consider the cures. Each case study in the teen book explains how God has provided various keys to unlock the chains of teen depression and anxiety. I previously tabulated

the causes; here I do the same with the cures. The first column names the teen and their particular problem, the second identifies the cures in the form of keys, and the third summarizes the exercises that help to turn the key.

KEYS TO CURING ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION		
Case	Key	Exercises
Introduction		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circle the words that describe your thoughts and feelings.
1. Circular Sarah	The Key of Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how anxiety and depression affect your thoughts, feelings, and body.
2. Tense Tom	The Key of Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk outside • Fitness app • Now-Here-This
3. Doomed Dave	The Key of Christ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categorize fears • Read a Gospel
4. Imaginative Imogen	The Key of Imagination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought-stopping • Image therapy
5. Panicky Paul	The Key of Medication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six checkpoints on meds
6. Faithless Flavia	The Key of Scripture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily Bible reading plan
7. Controlling Colin	The Key of Prayer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily prayer • ACTS pattern • Thanksgiving journal
8. Depressed Dan	The Key of Elephant Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psalm 77 therapy
9. Negative Nicole	The Key of Rethinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify false thoughts • Challenge false thoughts

KEYS TO CURING ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION		
Case	Key	Exercises
10. Workaholic Will	The Key of Rest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x 4 breathing • Body scan
11. Beautiful Brianna	The Key of Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who am I? • Rebuild identity
12. Media Max	The Key of Digital Detox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital detox questionnaire
13. Friendly Fiona	The Key of Christ's Friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendship advice
14. Bullied Benton	The Key of Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyberbullying solutions
15. Rebellious Rob	The Key of Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion with parents • Models of conflict resolution
16. Perfect Peyton	The Key of Realistic Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-counseling questions
17. Paralyzed Pam	The Key of Problem-Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work through challenging issue
18. Lonely Luke	The Key of Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunday project • Fear project • Service project

As with the causes, I haven't put this table of cures in the teen book because it might overwhelm our children. But for you, seeing the number of possible helps can be hope-giving and encouraging as you start out. And because teens need encouragement too, you can motivate them to join you on this journey in the following ways.

ENCOURAGE THEM THAT THEY HAVE ALREADY TAKEN A BIG STEP

If your teen is reading *Why Am I Feeling Like This?* he or she has already taken a big step on the path to recovery. As already noted, the vast majority of anxious and depressed teens do not seek or

get help. It should give our teens great hope that they are already at this stage in the process. It means they have listened to their emotions and responded by seeking help.

ENCOURAGE THEM WITH THE NUMBER OF CURES

The chapters in both books look at each of the cures in more detail, but the table lets you see all the possible cures summarized in one place. This is to underline the range of remedies that God has so graciously provided. If you think it appropriate, use the table to remind your teen how lavish God has been in providing so many cures that are within their reach. If one doesn't work, there's no need to be discouraged. There are many more keys to try. But do note that some will be better for your teens than others, and you may need to experiment a bit.

ENCOURAGE THEM TO SEE THE BIG PICTURE

If they do look at the table of keys and feel overwhelmed, guide them back to the big picture in the causes table. There we see a simple four-part structure that holds everything together: spiritual, physical, relational, and mental. Or, more simply: soul, body, relationships, mind. We want to train our teens to think about themselves and their problems using this simple four-part holistic framework.

ENCOURAGE THEM TO GET STARTED

Talking is easy, but we have to start doing. So come alongside them and support them as they take the first steps toward peace and joy. Remind them to prioritize reading their book and doing the exercises, because anxiety and depression can get worse if untreated, making them harder to dislodge.

ENCOURAGE THEM TO TAKE A STEP AT A TIME

It's never a good idea to attempt too much at one time. Try to judge your teen's capacity and pace the book accordingly. It might be an idea to take a few days or a week to process and think about each chapter. Only when it's been absorbed should your teen move

on to the next chapter. Alternatively, you could read the whole book together and then decide which three keys to focus on. The goal must be to make it manageable and doable.

ENCOURAGE THEM TO TURN THE KEY

At the end of each chapter of the teen book is a section called Turning the Key. Usually it includes a memory verse, a couple of questions or exercises, and a prayer. Rally your teen to learn the verse and answer the questions or do the exercises. We must help our teens to move from theory to practice and to learn new habits and skills for the future. That's what the keys are designed to do—build habits that will not only cure but also prevent reoccurrence. I've put more exercises in the adult book than in the teen book, because I wanted to keep things as simple as possible for the teens. At whyamIfeelinglikethis.com, you'll find more detailed videos and exercises that will also move theory into practice. We must be patient with our teens; the more they practice with these keys, the more progress they will make.

ENCOURAGE THEM TO WORK WITH YOU

Earlier we talked a little about the importance of working together if possible. Apart from making yourself available to answer questions, arrange set times each week or two when you will sit down with your teen and chat about what he or she has been learning. Use questions like:

- What did you find helpful in this chapter?
- What did you disagree with?
- What did you not understand?
- What did you do as a result of reading this chapter?
- What are you planning to do differently?
- How can I help you put this into practice?

Try to build a relationship that not only provides accountability but also support and sympathy.

ENCOURAGE THEM WITH YOUR OWN LESSONS

Remind your teen that although you may not have an anxiety disorder or depression, you do get anxious or sad from time to time. Share how the book is helping you to deal with your own emotional and mental distress. Show that you are also a struggler and you need and receive help too.

ENCOURAGE THEM THAT YOU WILL STAY WITH THEM

While expressing confidence in your teen that he or she can do this with God's help, we also need to be realistic. Sometimes our teens will forget or fail to read the chapter or do the exercises. Sometimes they will go back to old habits. Tell them that you expect this to happen from time to time, but you will stick with them. You will not give up on them. You are in this for the long haul.

ENCOURAGE THEM TO PRAY

Hopefully you already pray with your teens, but it's especially critical to do so as you work through the books together. Make sure you pray with them before and after each discussion session and ask God to deepen the lessons learned and make them permanent. But encourage them to also pray for themselves. I've provided prayers at the end of each chapter that they can use. But they can also make up their own prayers. Remind them that God hears their cries and blesses the means of healing that he has provided.

ENCOURAGE THEM WITH GROWTH

Overcoming anxiety and depression builds resilience and other character traits for future challenges (Rom. 5:3–5). If we can view this as an opportunity to learn rather than a disaster to avoid, we will help our teens see this painful experience as a special school with its own special lessons, which will often prepare them for life better than overprotecting them usually does.

1

CIRCULAR SARAH

Sarah was overwhelmed in her junior year by the pressure of being behind in her studies, upcoming exams, her school soccer schedule, and criticism from her older teammates. Feeling unwanted on her soccer team, she couldn't stop thinking about what she imagined the other girls thought and said about her. Eventually the vicious cycle of unstoppable thoughts affected her sleep, leaving her feeling exhausted, sick, fearful, and worried that she might be going crazy.

The Key of Understanding

As Sarah demonstrates, one of the most horrible aspects of anxiety and depression is the feeling of being out of control. The experience is disorienting and confusing, chaotic and disorderly. Teens feel as if they're being sucked into a vortex they cannot resist. That sense of being a passive victim, of having no control over these malevolent forces, is one of the most terrifying and paralyzing features of anxiety and depression.

Sarah's healing began when she was helped to understand the *worry > anxiety > stress cycle*. Although it doesn't feel like it at the time, there usually is a predictable order to anxiety. Helping our teens understand the normal process of anxiety can help prevent anxiety attacks, equip them to handle them better, and reduce their length and intensity. Let's look at the *worry > anxiety > stress cycle* and then consider the connection to depression.

WORRY

We must start by saying that worry and fear can be a good thing . . . in short and small doses. Our kids need a degree of worry if they are to successfully study for exams or avoid dangerous behavior. Good worry enables them to anticipate a potential problem and plan to avoid it or overcome it. Good worry comes at the right time and to the right degree to motivate right actions. Worry is natural in teens because they are moving from childhood to adulthood and encountering lots of new information and new challenges in themselves and in their lives.

Unless we help our teens understand and accept a degree of worry at certain times, they are going to become worried about every experience of worry. One of the most essential parenting skills is learning how to gradually expose our children to increasingly challenging situations that teach them to view fear and worry as appropriate and helpful, and build resilience for future challenges.¹ In contrast, anxious overparenting will often make our kids more anxious and unable to face difficulties in life.

Although worry can be good, worry can also be bad. Worry is a bad thing when it becomes a big thing or a constant thing, or when it is out of proportion to the problem or obstacle. It is a bad thing if it predicts problems or obstacles that are never likely to occur. It is a bad thing if it leads to excessive anxiety, the second step in the *worry > anxiety > stress cycle*.

ANXIETY

After worrying *thoughts* come anxious *feelings*. If it's good worry, the anxious feelings are also good. They help to motivate our kids and heighten their performance. Appropriate worry and anxiety before an exam or a sporting competition help our kids to focus and raise their game. The normal human stress

1. See Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind* (New York: Penguin, 2019) for more on overprotecting children from risks, ideas, and the uncomfortable.

response, sometimes called the fight-or-flight response, that God designed for our good injects extra adrenaline and cortisol into their systems, enhancing their senses, strength, concentration, and responses.

But if it's bad worry—if it's excessive and goes on too long—then bad anxiety is the result. Instead of helping, it hinders. Instead of improving performance, our kids end up paralyzed, panicky, or obsessive. When they think of the next test, the feelings of fear, dread, and terror overwhelm them and dominate their whole lives. It becomes obsessive, so that they cannot stop thinking about it. This may result in compulsive behavior and repetitive rituals connected with counting, cleaning, or checking things.

Sometimes it accelerates into a full-blown panic attack. The fight-or-flight system that was designed to be limited, brief, and rare switches on to sustained high alert with many damaging consequences.

Some teens, though, skip the worry stage and just go straight to anxiety. If we were to ask them, "Why are you worried or anxious?" they would reply, "I have no idea. I'm not thinking about anything in particular, I'm just always jumpy and anxious." They have a general anxiety, to one degree or another.

Whether the anxiety is specific or general, all this overactivity in their thoughts and feelings, all this worry and anxiety, often impacts their bodies in the form of stress.

STRESS

If worry takes place in the *thoughts*, and anxiety in the *feelings*, stress is what results in the *body*. Worried thoughts and anxious feelings multiply to produce frightening bodily effects: heart racing or pounding, breathlessness, headaches, trembling, tension, dizziness, cold sweats, twitching, stomach cramps, nausea, exhaustion, restlessness, insomnia, tightness in the chest or throat, and so on.

This then starts a never-ending loop because our kids start worrying about these physical symptoms. "Am I seriously ill? Am

I going to die? Am I going mad?” Which, of course, creates more anxiety and more stress, and so the *worry > anxiety > stress cycle* continues. They then feel ashamed and angry and may respond by avoiding people or places, resorting to alcohol or drugs, self-harm, and even thoughts of suicide.

Depression

Not surprisingly, once a teen has been through the *worry > anxiety > stress cycle* a few times, or is stuck in it, exhaustion and a sense of hopelessness set in, creating the ideal conditions for depression to join the cycle. Anxiety is mentally, emotionally, and spiritually exhausting, draining lives of joy and filling them with despair. Kids eventually give up fighting, and then depression adds its voice to the *worry > anxiety > stress cycle*.

But it doesn't always go that way. You can be depressed without being anxious and vice versa. Sometimes depression comes before anxiety, especially if a person has experienced serious illness, bereavement, trauma, or other painful events. Sadness and darkness overwhelm us, resulting in sleep problems, eating issues, confusion, indecisiveness, and a general sense of worthlessness and hopelessness. This often starts off the *worry > anxiety > stress cycle*, plunging the depressed person into an even deeper hole.

TURNING THE KEY

The teen book has a number of exercises and questions at the end of each chapter. Ideally, you want to work through these with your teen or at least informally help him or her as follows.²

1. *The Wave*. When your teen gets into the *worry > anxiety > stress cycle*, say to him, “We know what’s happening now. We understand it. Remember when you were young, and you saw a big wave coming when you were in the ocean? You were so scared at first because you didn’t know what was going to happen. But after a few waves passed, you learned to brace yourself, take a deep breath, feel the wave lifting you up and then lowering you down as it passed. Then you could relax again. Let’s view anxiety like that. Don’t fight it, just let it pass through.”

2. *The Roller Coaster*. Use the roller coaster illustration to help them view their emotions more objectively. When their emotions start carrying them away, say to them, “Get off the roller coaster of your feelings and watch the ups and downs instead.” By doing so, we are trying to help them view their feelings as a spectator rather than a participant. This helps to cool the emotions and view the experience more rationally and calmly.

3. *Labeling*. During or after an episode of anxiety, walk through the *worry > anxiety > stress cycle* with them. The exercise in their book asks them to describe how the experience impacts their thoughts, feelings, and body. Help them identify the sequence and label the thoughts. This labeling will give them a sense of control and reduce the power of their thoughts and feelings.

4. *The Box*. When they are ruminating over things people said to them, help them to visualize a box that they put the comment in, tape it up, and file on a shelf with a sign on it: “Danger: Do Not Open.”

5. *Schedule*. One of the causes of Sarah’s anxiety was overscheduling and overcommitment. Consider whether your teen is too busy and overcommitted, and needs to cut back in order to reduce the general pressure upon her.

6. *Connection*. Try to identify how much depression is in the mix and how it is connected to anxiety.

2. You will find extra exercises throughout this book that are not included in the teen book.

Have you ever looked at your anxious or depressed teenage son or daughter and wondered, *Why is my teenager feeling like this?*

In this companion guide to his book for teens *Why Am I Feeling Like This?*, pastor and counselor David Murray offers spiritual encouragement and practical direction for parents and other adults who want to help but don't know where to start. Structured around eighteen real-life examples, Murray provides tips for having open conversations with teens about anxiety and depression, as well as discussion questions, Bible verses for memorization, and prayers. With these tools in hand, parents and teenagers alike will be equipped to experience freedom from the chains of anxiety and depression.

“With this book (and the accompanying student version), parents no longer have to be or feel ill-prepared to navigate such overwhelming issues. I just wish I had this book years ago.”

ED STETZER, Executive Director, Billy Graham Center for Evangelism,
Wheaton College

“David Murray comes alongside parents who may be willfully naive about or find themselves completely overwhelmed by how to help their child deal with depression, offering understandable explanations of the issues and equipping them for important conversations.”

NANCY GUTHRIE, Bible teacher; author, *Even Better than Eden*

“I wish I had this book when I first entered youth ministry.”

CHRISTOPHER WALKER, Associate Pastor for Youth Ministry,
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

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