



NEWS RELEASE

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NAVIGATING TEENAGE DEPRESSION: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

With 14 percent, or nearly one million young people in Australia dealing with mental health problems, the Black Dog Institute has responded to a desperate call for help from distressed youth, parents and mental health professionals.

The Institute, a leader in the field of depression and bipolar disorder, spent 18 months coming up with a must-read book, titled *Navigating Teenage Depression: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* launched today by Her Excellency, the Governor of NSW, Marie Bashir AC, CVO, herself a qualified psychiatrist who predominately worked in the field of children's services.

The search for answers started with the Institute's 2007 writing competition, which encouraged young people, their family, carers and those looking back on their experiences to tell the intimate stories that provided a rare insight into their 'black dog' world.

The Institute was confronted with some inspiring stories, yet deeply troubling. An example: *'I remember crying myself to sleep when I was about nine years old, engulfed in a terrible grief I couldn't comprehend, let alone explain. I felt 10 years older than my peers and isolated from my teachers. I felt I knew terrible truths about the world they would never understand.'*

Another story could be summarised by the words *'Just a constant ocean of despair.'* And, then there was the sad admission: *'I found comfort where I could. I daydreamed at every opportunity, escaping to made-up places where all I had to do was find treasure and fight evil. It's much easier to be brave when faced with a fire-breathing dragon than faced with your own demons.'*

The gravity of the situation is further emphasised when you consider one in five Australian children aged 4 to 17 have significant mental health concerns. At the same time, young adults aged 18 to 24 have the highest prevalence of mental disorders of any age group.

Alarm bells were going off. Youth suicide has become the third most common cause of death in the 18 to 24 age group. This prompted the Black Dog Institute to take up the challenge to provide young people and their parents, as well as health professionals, with the 'tools' to manage a way forward.

The new book outlines the Black Dog Institute's approach and logic for teasing out the strands in teenage mood disorders. It lays out a systematic approach for sorting through depression and bipolar disorder amongst adolescents.

It also considers how to assess whether a teenager's mood disorder is at a 'clinical' level requiring treatment, what other factors might be impacting them, who can provide help, and in what ways. The most effective strategies for managing their mental health are also revealed by the teenagers themselves.

A major emphasis in the book, and the message of the Black Dog Institute, is that depression is not an 'it' but that there is logic for determining the type of depression. This provides a map for selecting the combination of treatments that are likely to be effective.

Parents have remarked: "We – like so many, tended to think that clinical depression happens to those others 'out there'. Yet depression's randomness is the very thing that impacts, frequently leaving carers utterly crushed: why us, why now?"

The book is published by Allen and Unwin and co-edited by the Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, Professor Gordon Parker, and psychologist and teacher, Kerrie Evers.

The editors identified a range of stresses for teenagers – most of which were not prevalent a couple of decades ago.

Today's teenagers have to deal with:

- the internet
- mass electronic media
- mobile phones
- global warming and other concerns
- premature sexualisation
- higher rates of divorce in their parents
- blended families
- 'designer drugs'
- breakdown of community groups
- rise of individualism
- downsides of affluence
- tougher peer culture, e.g. internet bullying

Navigating Teenage Depression clearly spells out what works to successfully combat a mood disorder. For some it is learning what works to get you better or maintaining a formal, written 'wellness' plan to systematically lay out how to help yourself.

The book is now available in bookstores and costs: \$24.99

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