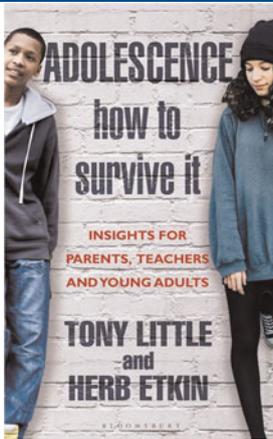


Book review

Edited by Allan Beveridge and Femi Oyeboade



Adolescence: How to Survive It - Insights for Parents, Teachers and Young Adults

By Tony Little and Herb Etkin
Bloomsbury, 2019. £16.99 (hb).
256 pp.
ISBN 9781472944702

There is a growing realisation that more needs to be done to inform parents, teachers and young people themselves about mental disorders. This is a book written by a child and adolescent psychiatrist (Herb Etkin) and former headmaster (Tony Little) with that aim in mind.

However, the authors' note does little to excite confidence in this enterprise. Tony Little begins with the somewhat bland assertion that his own adolescence 'was much like any other' and it was followed by 25 years as a head teacher in British public schools. Herb Etkin too apparently had a conventional and sporty adolescence in South Africa, before migrating to the country of 'Biggles, Just William, Enid Blyton, cricket and first class football'.

There are ten chapters of varying formats, with no index or references. Some chapters are presented as dialogues between Herb and Tony, which are presumably designed to give a matey feel, but others give some preliminary background before Herb and Tony break into their own opinions. Some chapters concern quite broad topics such as parenting and family life, but others are about a single theme such as food.

After a brief reflection on the anthropological, Herb and Tony turn their thoughts to what *is* normal adolescence. Herb laments

the lack of the old certainties and how 'the beatings that some of us received [...] are now rightly forbidden'. Tony elaborates with a description of the Foster chop (involving the metal edge of a ruler), but concedes that teachers have been obliged to become more skilled with the demise of corporal punishment. That's a relief then.

On parenting and family life we learn that Tony has his own typology of parents: the Velcro type, the lawnmower type, the helicopter type and the bulldozer; and that Herb is dead against the liberalisation of divorce laws.

On sexuality there is a handy glossary of gender identity terms and a full list of sexually transmitted diseases on offer to the reader. There is some advice about coming out as being gay; but very little about dealing with pornography. Matters of consent are briefly mentioned, but it is unclear what is being normalised as sexual experimentation in all-male environments.

The chapter on food seems very long and eating disorders are described at length. Herb holds sway here, but won't be drawn into all that vegetarian or vegan nonsense, or attempts by the nanny state to deal with childhood obesity.

Curiously, all of the other mental disorders affecting young people, such as anxiety and depression, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), appear to be squeezed into the chapter on emotional turbulence and cover merely a few pages. Very little attention is given to ADHD, which is much more prevalent than any eating disorder. There is some clinical misinformation about ASD here also (for example DNA being used to diagnose it) and no mention of well-known sources of support such as the National Autistic Society.

Overall, parents and teachers who identify most with the authors may find the conversational approach of this book helpful and the bland generalisations reassuring. However, it is not one that I would recommend. There are important areas left out altogether, such as abuse and domestic violence; and the information on clinical disorders is brief and disproportionately concerned with eating disorders. It should have been more uniformly edited, with more accurate clinical advice, better organised parental advice and more reference to the views of young people themselves.

Sarah Huline-Dickens , Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Livewell Southwest Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Mount Gould Hospital, Plymouth, UK. Email: sarah.huline-dickens@pms.ac.uk

doi:10.1192/bjp.2020.49