

SUGGESTED INTERVIEW Q&A

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS, & TIME REQUIRED

Q What was your inspiration for *Escape from Dark Places*?

40 sec.

A One in four college students has a diagnosable mental illness, and the number is growing. I discovered the truth of that statistic in 2012 when I went to pick up my promising millennial son for his college graduation only to find he was so overcome by the pain of anxiety and depression that he could barely get out of bed. Now he is on his way to a successful career in the finance industry, managing his anxiety well, and finding happiness and success on his path to reach his full potential.

Had we not sought to understand one another's generations and embark on that journey to healing together, chances are he wouldn't have made such exceptional progress. I want your listeners to know what to do in a similar situation and how to catch the problem earlier to eliminate some of the pain involved in the recovery process.

My son is my inspiration. He is the one who had the strength and determination to escape from the dark places where anxiety and depression live. I simply walked beside him providing the support and guidance he needed to chart and follow a course to recovery. And I am there for him even now as he is working to attain those key life skills so many millennials are lacking.

Q Why did you write *Escape from Dark Places*?

20 sec.

A A majority of young people who suffer from a mental health condition do not ask for help. Anxiety is the biggest culprit, and the problem continues to grow. Anxiety often leads to depression, which many times ends in suicide. Now is the time for a solution.

Millennials are a strange amalgam of optimism, confidence, anxiety, nihilism, and despair. But they are more likely to comply with authority than other generations, they are quickly advancing into management positions in the workplace as boomers retire, they are relentless optimists, many are moving back home, and they are listening. Now is the time to take action!

The last thirty years has ushered in a tremendous amount of change, and as a result we have seen a major shift in

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philosophical perspective. I wrote *Escape from Dark Places* to put mental health in a historical and cultural context where it can be better understood. I tell my story of a mother-and-son journey of triumph over anxiety and depression to offer hope and to provide practical guidelines for helping others connect, relate, and recover—connect with other generations, build lasting relationships that empower, and engage in the kind of dialogue that supports recovery.

Q What problem does your book aim to resolve?

20 sec.

A Statistics clearly show that mental health disorders are on the rise, particularly anxiety, and particularly in millennials and their successors, Generation Z. I look around and I see these adolescents and young adults struggling. Like my son, they seem confident, but in reality they are lonely and isolated, they don't have a strong sense of self, they are easily frustrated, and they have unrealistic expectations of themselves and those around them. Many people do not understand the problem and do not know how to help, so they are forced to stand by and watch the struggle or rely solely on the medical community. *Escape from Dark Places* tackles the problem by providing a framework for change mapping out practical steps forward in an effort to turn this trend around.

Q In your book, you argue that environmental causes are largely generational. What do you mean by that?

40 sec.

A In 2015, the millennial generation surpassed the boomers to become the largest generation in history. Also, people are living longer, so six generations are now living on this earth for the very first time.

Furthermore, the changes that have come about as a result of globalization and the technology boom and the pace at which those changes have taken place is unprecedented. As a result, the twenty-first century has seen a major shift in philosophical perspective.

For example, we see a discrediting of authority, expertise, knowledge, and importance of achievement; a shift in the primary goal of education from the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake

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to the pursuit of skills for the sake of job acquisition; the emergence of new technologies, which diminishes the emphasis on quality and craftsmanship; and a desire for novelty, entertainment, even shock and stimulation— instant gratification— to name a few.

Perhaps most importantly, we now live in a culture where everything has meaning only as it relates to the self. This perspective limits people's ability to see beyond the self, and thereby causes both societal and spiritual disconnects that prevent people from living rich and meaningful lives.

The chaos and confusion of the postmodern world, the loss of traditions, and the inability of older generations to connect with young people and guide them is making it increasingly difficult for our kids to transition into adulthood, find happiness, and succeed.

Q How are people living in the twenty-first century disconnected from society?

A Unrealistic expectations cause many of the societal disconnects that impact mental health. Technology, for example, sets up unrealistic expectations. Young people don't have real relationships in the real world; instead, they have virtual relationships in cyberspace. Social media users create for themselves the image they want to portray to the world—an image of a life filled with excitement, adventure, and success—when in reality, we all have our share of challenges and misfortune. Many times, the pressure to keep up with the virtual success of peers results in isolation and causes anxiety.

1 min.

Parenting styles that overemphasize the value of high self-esteem can also set up unrealistic expectations. Many parents and schools promote giving a trophy to every child despite their level of effort or performance and telling them that they can be whatever they want regardless of their strengths and weaknesses and despite external factors such as the economy that often create barriers they will have to overcome on their path to success.

Then, when the kids reach their late teens and early twenties and their unrealistic expectations crash into a world plagued by unfavorable economic circumstances and other challenges, they

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experience a sense of inertia, which impedes their ability to transition into adulthood and yields an increase in mental health challenges, such as stress, anxiety, depression, and even suicide. While society is becoming increasingly aware of the dangers of spending too much time on social media and instilling a false sense of self-esteem, there has been no real movement to change the paradigm.

Q Why is it important to be spiritually connected?

30 sec

A Human beings have been looking for the answers to big life questions since antiquity. At the same time that anxiety and depression are on the rise, the US and nations around the world are becoming increasingly secularized. Materialists contend that the only thing we can believe in is what can be proven, and the only thing that can be truly proven is matter. So they are telling young people that life has no meaning, and since there is no meaning, there is no need to pursue questions about the purpose of the world.

I contend that human beings need meaning and purpose to get out of bed in the morning and to keep going. Science can't prove that God does not exist and theology cannot prove that He does. And the truth is, even if you do not believe in God, you believe in something. These are chaotic and times, so it is especially critical that we all take the time and effort to establish or validate our belief system. By making a spiritual connection, young people can instill knowledge and truth into their lives and introduce the stability and certainty they are searching for.

Q Your book shifts the conversation about anxiety and depression from talking about moms being part of problem to moms being part of the solution, so what can mothers do to help?

20 - 30 sec.

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A There are many ways that both moms and dads can help. You can:

- Look for signs of anxiety and depression in your children
- If you suspect your child has a mental disorder, do your research and seek help
- Start a dialogue with your children about managing stress, and (if necessary), how to manage anxiety and depression
- Reconsider how you and your family define and talk about recovery from mental illness
- Recognize and accept intergenerational similarities and differences and encourage family members to do the same
- Help your children establish boundaries and formulate a healthy sense of self
- Reflect back to your children who you see and experience them to be
- Establish a dialogue with your emerging adult (18 - 25/29) that utilizes mentoring and coaching techniques
- Demonstrate for your children how to develop real relationships in the real world and encourage them to do the same
- Make a concerted effort to bring valuable traditions back into your family
- Share family history and stories to help instill a better sense of self in your children

Q **What is intergenerational dialogue, and how will it help improve mental and spiritual health?**

20 sec.

A Intergenerational dialog is the practice of having face-to-face conversations with individuals of different generations for the purpose of gaining an enlightened understanding of the way others perceive the world. And, much like the Socratic Method, the practice serves to reveal underlying assumptions and stimulate critical thinking. Intergenerational dialogue also:

- Empowers us to answer big life questions
 - Forces us outside of ourselves
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- Encourages us to go deep
 - Helps us formulate a more stable sense of self
 - Helps us find common ground

Q Tell me about the toolkit you are building.

30 sec.

A The toolkit I am building is designed to help people have those tough conversations about mental health: moms with their kids, mentors with their mentees, church leaders with their church groups. Intergenerational dialogue is a means of finding mutual understanding that builds a bridge across the diverging generations. The aim of tools for triumph is to empower young people by helping them to:

- Accomplish a more stable sense of self
- Filter out the noise of technology
- Think about the big life questions that bring life meaning and purpose
- Attain real world life skills
- And finally, to initiate a stronger conversation about prevention and recovery

Intergenerational dialog is mutually beneficial. Older generations also learn from millennials, not only about technology, but also about creativity, innovation, and how to stay relevant and competitive in our rapidly changing world.

Q How did you come to your passion and purpose in life?

1 min.

A I have been passionate about the power of words and about writing practically all my life. For many years, I was a technical writer in various industries including software development, finance, and construction, so I thrive on the challenge of writing about topics I don't know much about. I conduct in-depth research, interview people, write and rewrite until I figure it out. For me, writing is a painstaking but exciting and rewarding process of discovery.

So when I found my son in his college apartment so overcome by his battle with anxiety and depression that he struggled to attend

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his own graduation, I knew I was facing something I didn't know much about. In the course of our mother-and-son journey to recovery, I found it extremely difficult to navigate the medical and psychological communities, my own emotions, and my relationship with my son. I found the best strategy for finding my way and then for being able to look back and make sense of it all was to write it down. And once I started writing it down, I was compelled to encourage others with my story and to share what I learned.

Now I am passionate about writing AND about connecting the generations, about building lasting relationships that empower, and about teaching people how to play a critical role in preventing anxiety and depression and supporting recovery. I show people how to connect, relate, and recover.

Q When did you start writing?

30 sec.

A I recall liking to write when I was in elementary school. My English teachers encouraged me; they nominated me to attend special writing workshops and events and posted my work on the bulletin board. More than that, I liked to organize information. I remember as a senior in high school going to a yearbook conference in NYC where they held a competition to see who could best organize a yearbook based on impromptu data. I was able to structure the information in a way that was unique and intriguing, so I won that competition. After that I realized that the ability to create and structure writing projects was a gift. I've been able to leverage that gift in various ways throughout my career.

To me, writing is like putting a huge puzzle together. You take little pieces of information that don't mean much by themselves and put them together one by one with graphics to create a complete picture that makes sense to people and is applicable to their lives.

Q What challenges have you faced with your writing?

20 sec.

A When I was working in the corporate world and raising my children, my biggest challenge was time. Now I know how to get more work done in the same amount of time with the same level of quality.

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Early in my career, at the end of the day, I didn't have the energy or mental capacity left to write an intelligible sentence. But since I became a fulltime writer in 2013, I have been able to draw on the efficiencies I gained by working in corporate America and get more quality work done in less time.

Q What do you intend for readers to take away from your book?

20 sec.

A My goal is to help readers gain a new appreciation for the depth and breadth of the anxiety problem in the world today, and to help them recognize how much our young people are struggling. I want them to think about their own lives and relationships, and then respond to my call to action—to connect and build relationships across generations and effectively support recovery. I want readers to feel empowered to have those tough conversations about mental health. I want us to enable young people to triumph over anxiety and depression so they can succeed and thrive.

Q What impact would you like to see your book have on the world?

20 sec.

Q My Mission is to help create a world where communication bridges the gap between the six living generations, igniting a deep, mutual understanding between us. This will help us mend the societal and spiritual disconnects at the root of the twenty-first century rise in anxiety and depression. And I join the host of others who envision a world where those with mental disorders are viewed no differently than those with chronic physical illness.

Let's connect the generations; let's build real relationships in the real world, lasting relationships that empower; let's step up to play a leading role in preventing anxiety and depression and supporting recovery.

Q How can people connect with you?

15 sec.

A Website: ambrowatkins.org (1. Read my blog, 2. Subscribe to receive more information, 3. Tell Your Story of challenges and successes with communicating across generations and improving mental and spiritual health)

- Email: ambra@ambrowatkins.org

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- Twitter: twitter.com/AmbraWatkins
 - Facebook: facebook.com/guidepoststohope
 - LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/ambrawatkins

Remember: Go to my website, ambrawatkins.org, and Tell Your Story.

—Providing the Right Tools for the Right Conversations at the Right Time—