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Book Synopsis & Points of Interest

Escape from Dark Places: Guideposts to Hope in an Age of Anxiety & Depression

A motivating story of triumph over anxiety and depression, this mother-and-son journey offers practical steps toward mental and spiritual health that will empower young people to find purpose and hope in the postmodern Age of Anxiety.

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2-Line Summary

A motivating mother-and-son journey to mental and spiritual health that will empower young people to find purpose in the postmodern world.

Short Synopsis

Escape from Dark Places tells the author's personal story of how she and her millennial son battled anxiety and depression. The author takes you on a journey to answer questions such as, How big is the problem? Why is the number of those suffering trending upward? And how can we stop the stigma? The author draws on history, psychology, science, and philosophy to construct a solution and looks at generational theory for ways to bridge the abyss that separates boomers and millennials. The book provides practical guidelines for engaging young people and their parents, grandparents, mentors, and church leaders in effective intergenerational dialogue.

Long Synopsis

Mental illness, and anxiety in particular, is increasing among millennials and their Generation Z successors at an alarming rate. *Escape from Dark Places* explores the questions:

- How big is the problem?
- What is the source of the problem?
- What can parents, grandparents, church leaders, and mentors do to help?

Millennials blame boomers and Xers for their shattered expectations, while boomers and Xers scratch their heads and ask why millennials don't just buck up. The gap between the two largest generations (millennials and boomers) has expanded into a gaping abyss, and the finger pointing approach does not help. If we do not build a bridge to understanding, the trend will continue upward with major consequences.

Escape from Dark Places tells the author's personal story of how she and her millennial son battled anxiety and depression. The honesty by which each shares

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their individual experience enables a view into dark places from both generational perspectives. The journey for answers reveals how the loss of tradition and the massive societal, political, and spiritual change initiated by globalization and the technology explosion created the disconnects that threaten the mental and spiritual health of upcoming generations.

The author states the hard facts, which reveal the astounding statistics and attitudes surrounding mental health disorders and the nonmedical use of prescription drugs. Then, relying on her expertise in training and change management, she proceeds to explore the controversial questions: What causes anxiety and depression? And how do we reverse the trend and stop the stigma? She makes a convincing case that living in the twenty-first century postmodern world has a tremendous impact on health, and the argument elicits a call to action that is both convincing and motivating.

Escape from Dark Places explains what it means to recover from mental health disorders and links the inability to recognize the similarity between mental and physical disease as the primary barrier to stopping the stigma. She also demonstrates how moms and others typically side-lined in the recovery process can play a critical role in empowering young people to:

1. Accomplish a more stable sense of self without micromanaging or helicopter parenting
2. Filter out the noise of technology and the Information Age to reduce stress and anxiety
3. Initiate a stronger conversation about prevention and recovery that can better drive attitudinal change
4. Think about the big life questions that enrich our lives with meaning and purpose
5. Attain real world life skills that enrich interpersonal relationships and promote success in the workplace

No one can change the fact that there is a gaping abyss between Boomers and Millennials, but people can build a bridge. The need is urgent, and the time is now, as the trend toward anxiety is rising and boomers are already beginning to transition

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leadership positions to the next generations. *Escape from Dark Places* provides the framework for having effective intergenerational dialogue that will inspire societal and spiritual reconnects, fight indifference, create significance, stop the stigma—and spread hope.

Points of Interest

- The Number of Young People with Mental Health Disorders is Dangerously High and Growing
“One in four young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 have a diagnosable mental illness, and more than one out of four college students have been diagnosed or treated by a professional for a mental health condition within the past year.”
- The Road to Recovery from a Mental Health Condition is Neither Clear Nor Easy
“Suddenly confronted with the reality and pain of my son’s anxiety and depression, my motherly instincts and professional experience kicked in. I set out determined to assess the problem and fix it. But the complex, multi-faceted project quickly transformed into a journey.”
- The Nonmedical Use of Prescription Drugs is Rampant on College Campuses
“Six frosted cans of Miller Lite pushed 10 milligrams of Valium down my pipe. Nothing happened. My tolerance was dangerously high.” (the voice of author’s millennial son)
- It is Critical that We Establish Guideposts to Hope Before Knowledge is Gone
“If we do not set up guideposts to mental and spiritual health in the twenty-first century, all may be lost. The relativism that pervades this era, the connectedness that has slipped away in the context of the postmodern world, may never be regained, as those with knowledge and life experience of what it was like to live prior to the Information Age pass away.”

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- Now it the Time to Break Through Barriers of Communication as Young People Enter the Workforce

If we do not build a bridge of understanding across the generational abyss and break through the barriers to communication, there are bound to be major consequences. And the need is urgent, as Boomers are already beginning to transition leadership positions to the next generations.

Additional Excerpts

The Problem

- Anxiety and depression are significant problem in today's society.

“One in four young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four have a diagnosable mental illness, and more than one out of four college students have been diagnosed or treated by a professional for a mental health condition within the past year.”

- The twenty-first century mindset is a primary cause of the rise in anxiety and depression.

“The postmodern world highlights the ambivalence of the human experience. The lines are now blurred between what is real and what is not real, what is of good quality and what is of poor quality, what is experimental and what is complete—even what is moral and what is immoral. Postmodernity calls into question the very meaning and purpose of existence, whether life has any meaning or purpose, that is.”

The Solution

- The anxiety problem requires an intergenerational solution.

“Change requires a resolve across generations to address the issue of disconnectedness and all that disconnectedness implies. In cooperation, the generations can raise awareness of postmodern challenges, reduce the impact of stress, anxiety, and depression, and help stop the stigma surrounding mental illness.”

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- The intergenerational solution is communication in the form of face-to-face dialogue.

“This loss of traditions in combination with the massive change initiated by globalization and the information technology explosion was bound to cause disconnects—disconnects between the self and community, between the self and spirituality—but what surprises me most is the extent to which our children have lost their overall sense of self. I cannot change the evolution of thought or the fact that there is a gaping abyss between boomers and millennials, but I can build a bridge.”

“It seems to me that this communication piece is missing from the current strategy to stop the stigma. What we need are the right tools for having the right conversations at the right time with the right mentor and mentee relationships.”

“What young people need are real relationships grounded in the real world. Long-term intergenerational relationships can provide an effective vehicle for filtering through the noise that technology and the Information Age impose.”

- People typically sidelined from the recovery process can be an important part of the solution.

“At the onset of my journey, I was uninformed and ill-equipped to provide the support my son needed; I felt guilty. I found that mothers are often regarded as part of the anxiety problem and are seldom included as part of the solution. I felt marginalized. But I soon learned that it does not have to be that way.”

Why now?

- *“If we do not build a bridge of understanding across the generational abyss and break through the barriers to communication, there are bound to be major consequences. And the need is urgent, as Boomers are already beginning to transition leadership positions to the next generations.”*

Why Ambra?

- *“Ambra Watkins, the mother of multiple millennials, is intrigued by what is proving to be a baffling yet compelling generation. She is concerned for trophy kids*

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whose high expectations crashed into the reality of an economic downturn and is burdened for those souls that are desperately searching for meaning and purpose in the ambiguity of the postmodern world.”