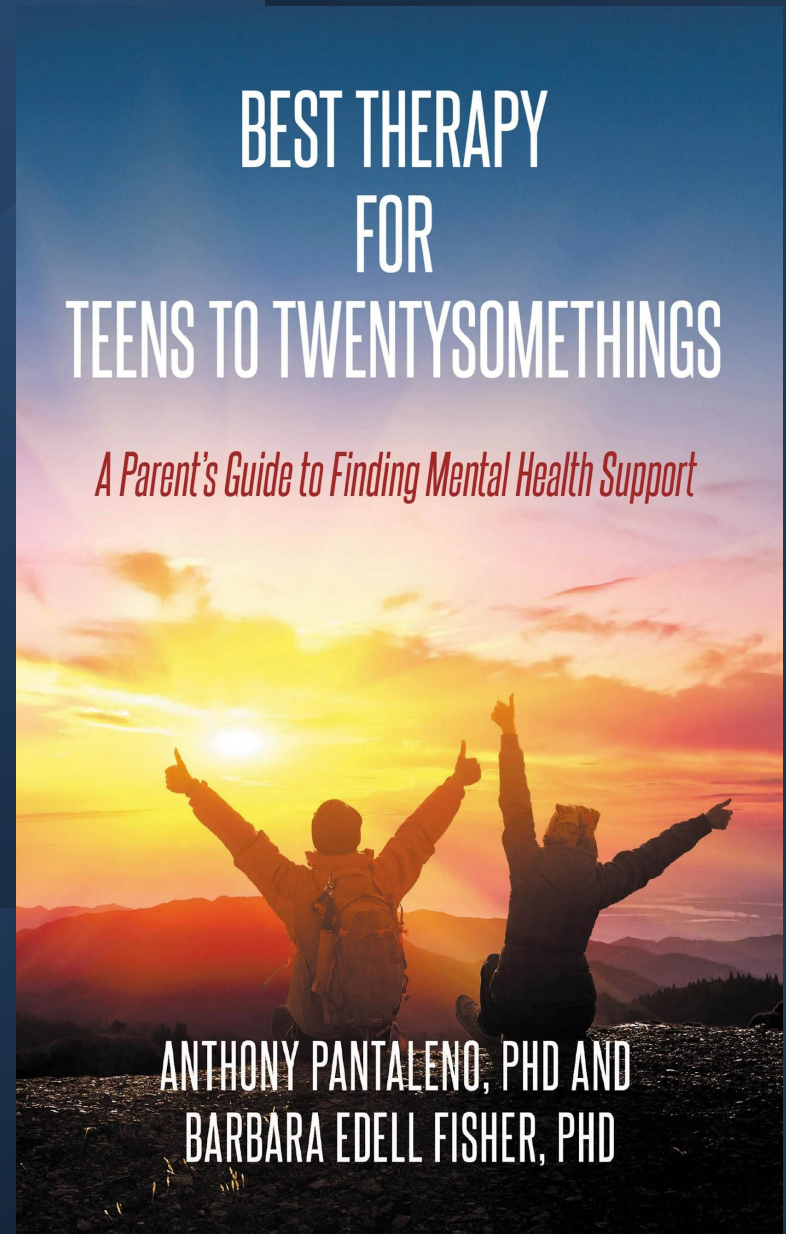
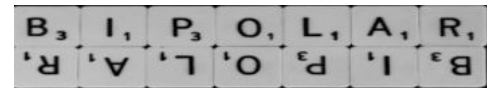


Beyond Best Therapy for Teens to Twentysomethings NEA BPD October 6, 2025

Anthony Pantaleno, Ph.D.
& Barbara Edell Fisher, Ph.D.



Bipolar Disorder from the eyes of
an emerging adult... used with
permission of the author
Tess Jablonowski
A post-hospitalization experience.



A woman with long brown hair, wearing a grey beanie and a grey long-sleeved shirt, is shown from the chest up. She has her eyes closed and her hands are pressed against her face, covering her mouth and nose. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor scene with warm, golden light, possibly from the setting or rising sun. In the top left corner, there is a small red rectangular graphic element.

A Staggering Mental Health Crisis

It is estimated that one in five adults in the US lives with a mental illness.

If you have children, your children, in middle school and high school today are more than a standard deviation more stressed, depressed, and anxious than they were 30 years ago...

Steven Hayes, Founder of ACT, 2024



Sobering Statistics

48M Americans live with substance use disorder (100k overdoses/yr)

16M diagnosed with depression annually

31% experience anxiety disorder in lifetime

132 suicides/day in the U.S.

26% high school students chronically absent (2022–23)

US surgeon general calls
parent stress a public
health challenge

By Jeff Mason

August 28, 2024

U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy speaks during a Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing entitled "Why Are So Many American Youth in a Mental Health Crisis? Exploring Causes and Solutions," on Capitol Hill in Washington, U.S., June 8, 2023.



The issue of guns in America...

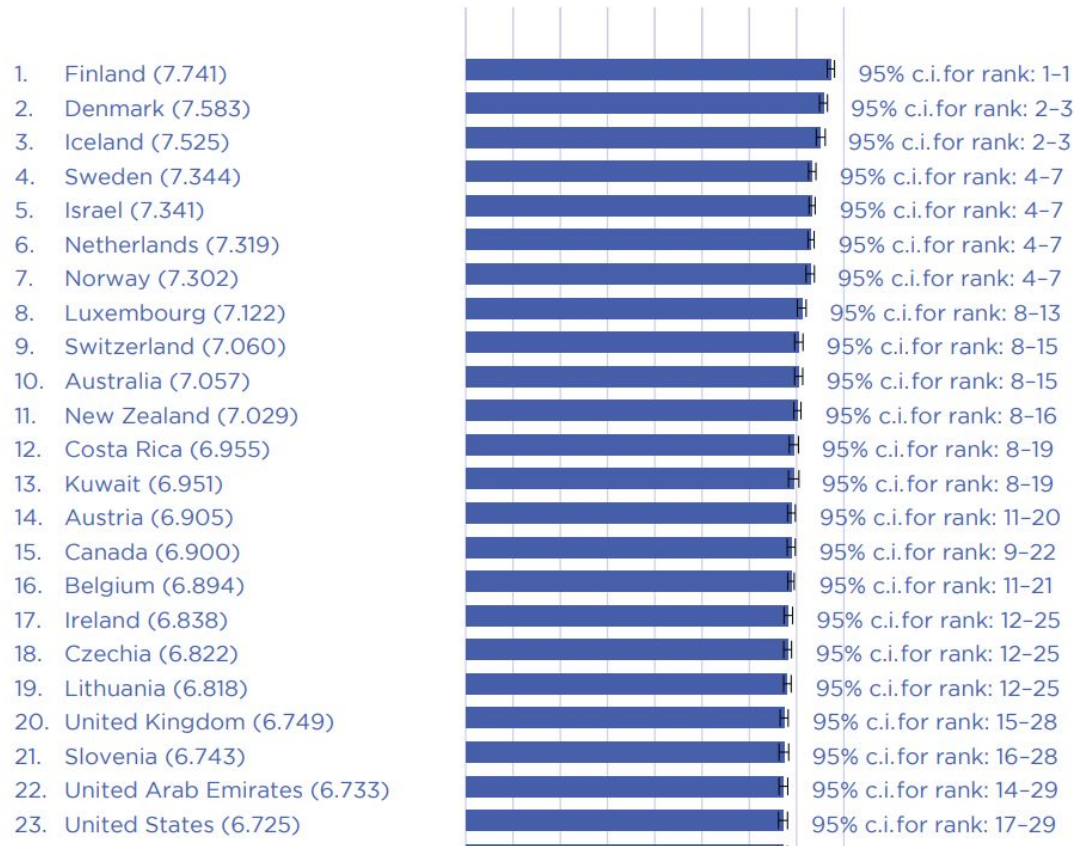
The number of AR-15 rifles in civilian hands rose from 400,000 in the early 1900s to more than 20 million by the 2020s.

Wall Street Journal July 15,
2024

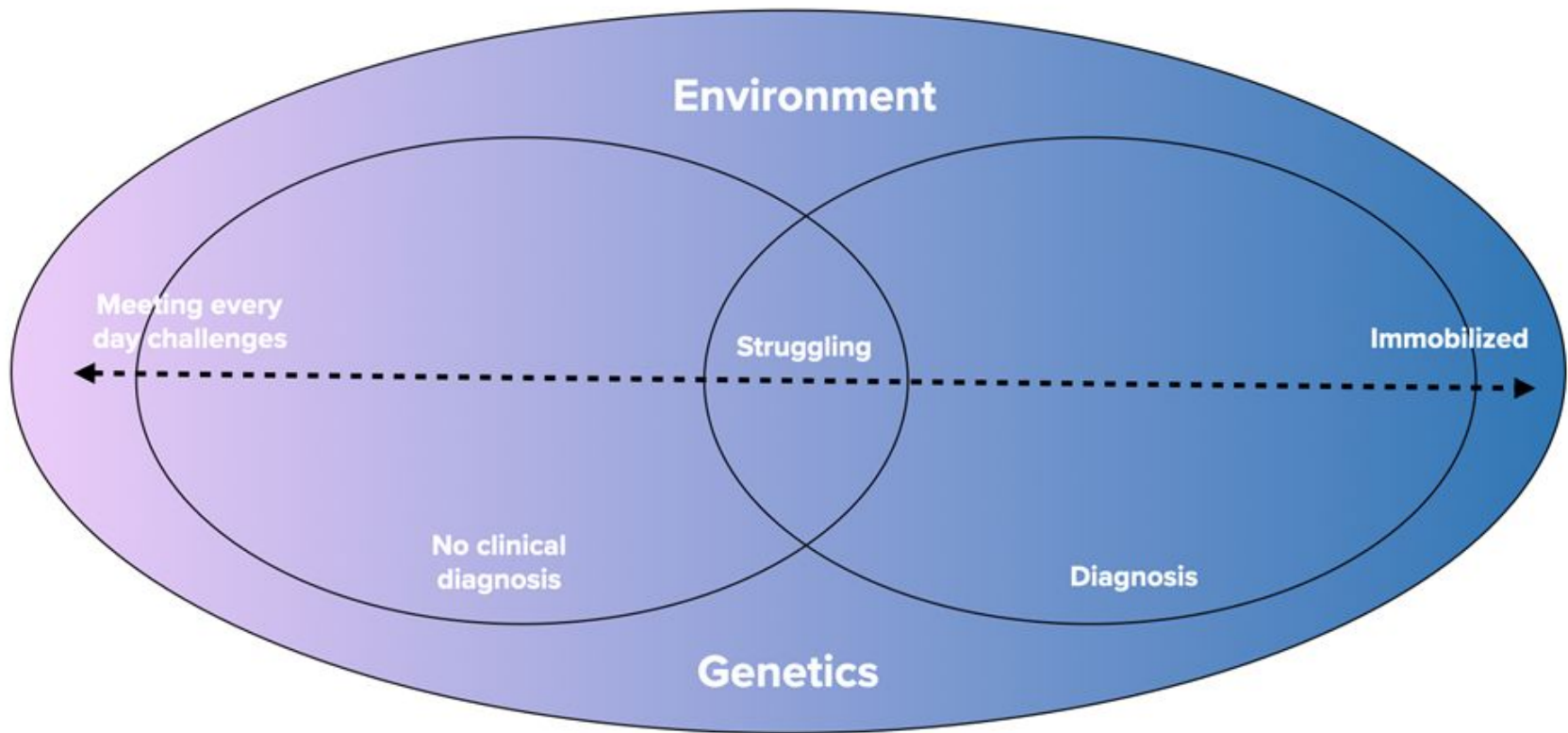


Of the 143 countries in the 2024 World Happiness Report, the US ranked 62nd for people under 30

Figure 2.1: Country Rankings by Life Evaluations in 2021-2023



MENTAL HEALTH IS ON A SPECTRUM





The Stakes for Teens & Emerging Adults

- Mental health lies on a spectrum
- Need to de-pathologize normal struggles
- Without access → risks escalate
- Positive role models show resilience (e.g., Simone Biles)

Beliefs About Mental Health Have Evolved, but Stigma Remains



88%

Percentage of U.S. adults who say that having a mental health disorder is nothing to be ashamed about, with **83%** saying they are generally comfortable talking about their mental health.

84%

Percentage of U.S. adults who think the term “mental illness” still carries a **stigma**. Similarly, **35%** of adults say they would **view someone differently** if they discovered that person had a mental health condition.

55%

Percentage of U.S. adults who cited **feeling emotionally safe** as the reason they chose to share their mental health struggles with someone else, with **54%** saying that **experiencing relief** was why they shared their struggles.

Sources: Harris/APA Poll conducted April 18–25, 2025, with 1,076 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. Available at <https://theharrispoll.com/briefs/mental-health-awareness-month-key-findings-on-u-s-attitudes-and-barriers-to-care-2/>.

Characteristics of Emerging Adults

Arnett, J. J. “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late teens Through the Twenties. *American Psychologist*, May 2000. 55 (5) 469–480

- 1. Identity explorations. Who am I and what do I want in this life? Will I make it out there?**
- 2. Instability. Change, change, change in self-perception, relationships, career direction, etc.**
- 3. Self-focus. Gradually learning to make independent decisions and owning those decisions.**
- 4. Feeling in-between. No longer feeling like a teen but neither a real adult.**
- 5. Sense of possibilities. Can I really be anything I choose like I was told as a kid?**
- 6. Feeling in-between- no longer a teen but not yet a full adult.**

+

•

0

**Poll... what
makes teens
unique as
psychotherapy
clients? Raise
hands poll...**

Can think more abstractly and need fewer concrete examples to understand complex thought patterns.

Need to understand the purpose and relevance of instructional activities

May be internally and externally motivated

May have self-imposed cognitive barriers due to years of academic failure and lack of self-confidence

May have shut down in certain cognitive areas and will need to learn how to learn and overcome these barriers to learning

Want to assume individual responsibility for learning and home tasks



Borderline Personality Disorder

- Diagnosis guides treatment but doesn't define person
- Right-fit therapist: trust, safety, understanding
- APA 2024: evidence-based, collaborative approaches

What core BPD Symptoms cause the greatest stress for caregivers?

Lower Stress Impact

```
graph TD; A[Lower Stress Impact] --> B[Chronic feelings of emptiness<br/>Parents may notice their child frequently expressing boredom, lack of purpose, or a sense of inner void. While distressing, this symptom tends to create sadness or worry rather than acute crisis.]; B --> C[Identity disturbance<br/>Rapid shifts in self-image, goals, and values can confuse parents, but this usually causes less immediate stress than behaviors that are self-destructive or aggressive.];
```

Chronic feelings of emptiness

Parents may notice their child frequently expressing boredom, lack of purpose, or a sense of inner void. While distressing, this symptom tends to create sadness or worry rather than acute crisis.

Identity disturbance

Rapid shifts in self-image, goals, and values can confuse parents, but this usually causes less immediate stress than behaviors that are self-destructive or aggressive.

BPD and Caregiver stress cont'd

Moderate Stress Impact

Intense and unstable relationships

Parents often struggle with their child's alternating idealization and devaluation of them (and others). This “push–pull” dynamic erodes family trust and stability, leaving parents feeling helpless.

Emotional instability / rapid mood swings

Frequent shifts between anger, sadness, anxiety, and euphoria exhaust caregivers who feel they must remain hypervigilant.

Higher Stress BPD Behaviors

Inappropriate, intense anger
Verbal aggression, hostility, or sudden rages directed at parents are highly stressful. Parents may feel attacked, unappreciated, or unsafe in their own homes.

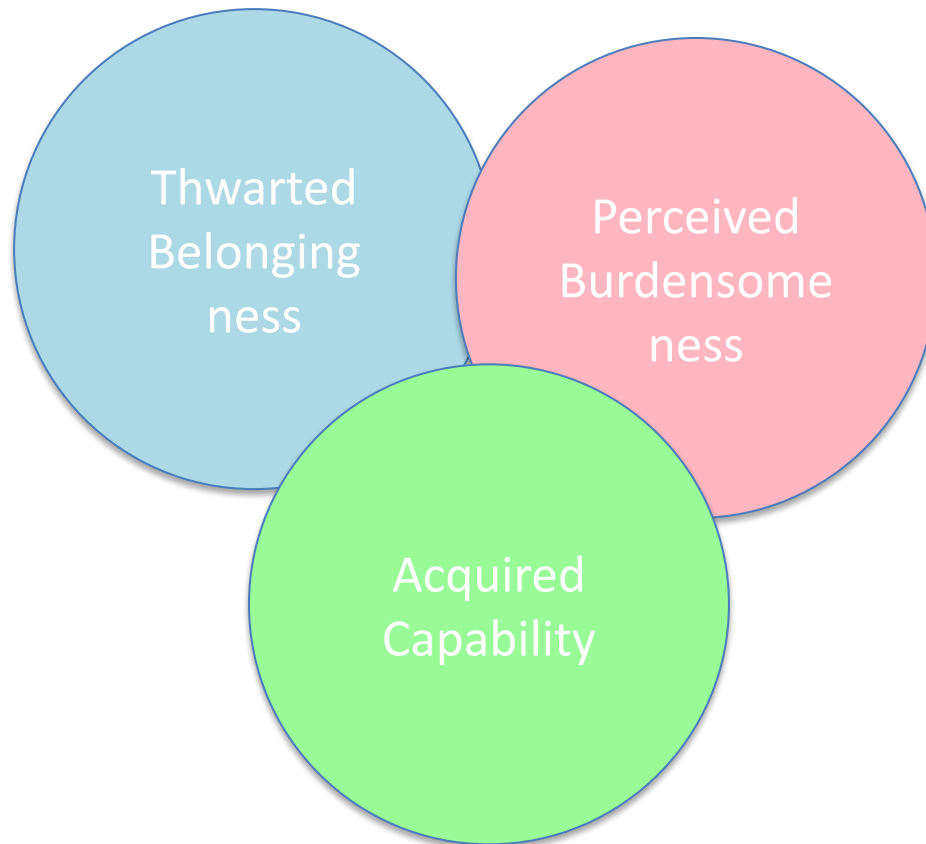
Impulsivity (in areas like spending, sex, substance use, reckless driving, binge eating)
These behaviors generate fear, conflict, and sometimes financial/legal crises that directly involve the family.

Highest Stress Impact

Recurrent suicidal behaviors, gestures, or threats, and self-harm

This is consistently reported as the single most stressful feature for parents. The constant worry that their child may hurt or kill themselves creates chronic fear, guilt, and emotional burnout.

Interpersonal Theory of Suicide – Visual Model –Thomas Joiner, Ph.D.



Overlap of Belongingness & Burdensomeness → Suicidal Desire
All Three Combined → Highest Risk for Suicide

2025 Guidelines APA

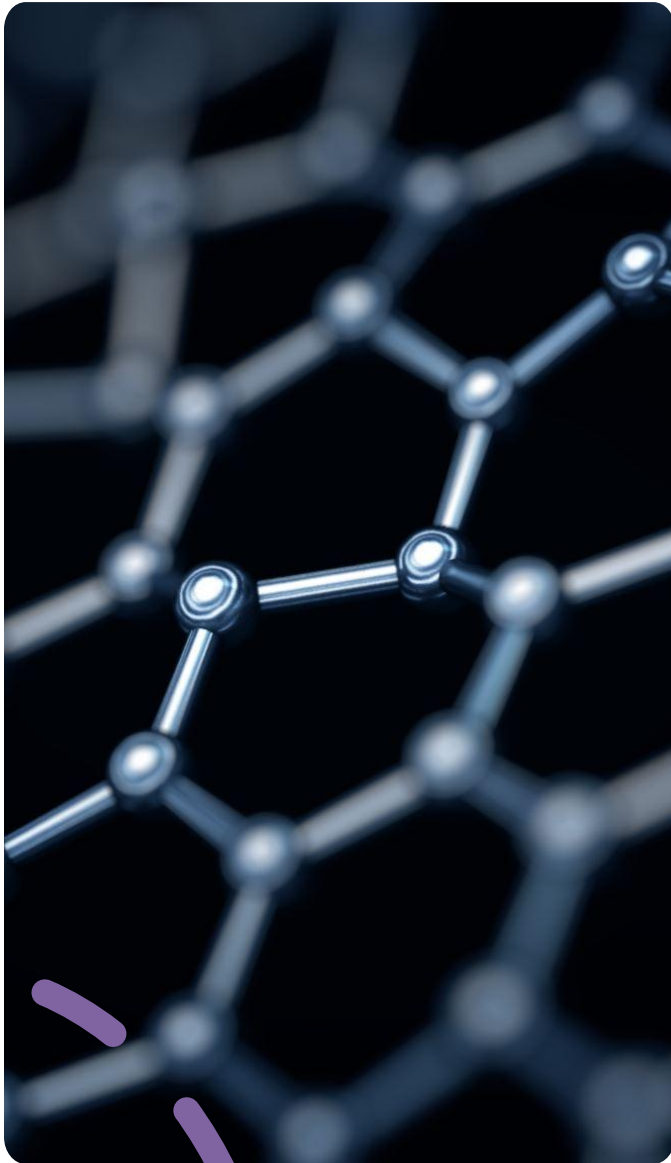
“APA recommends ... that a patient with borderline personality disorder have a review of co-occurring disorders, prior psychotherapies, other nonpharmacological treatments, past medication trials, and current medications before initiating any new medication.”

What are some obstacles for parents in seeking treatment for their T2T?

- Parents don't know the difference between the different therapy modalities
- Parents don't always see the role of the family system or other systems (school, community) in creating or perpetuating mental health problems for their child
- Parents grew up in an environment where therapy was not valued
- Parents had one bad experience with a provider and have given up on the process.
- Parents don't see therapy as preventive- a way of providing tools to manage stress
- Parents still feel that there is a stigma associated with getting help

SOME KEY CHALLENGES FOR PARENTS...

- 1. How to start the conversation...
- 2. How to keep cool if my T2T is reactive
- 3. How to present a welcoming introduction to psychotherapy
 - Voluntary nature of the process
 - Therapist preferences
 - Models collaborative problem solving process
 - Limits of confidentiality
 - Contract for three sessions
 - Negotiating endings
- 4. How to handle T2T refusal
- 5. Willingness to become involved in treatment if my T2T desires
- 6. Willingness to stay out of it if this is what my T2T needs



What parents can do...

- Stay calm during emotional storms
- Validate feelings, not destructive behavior
- Set consistent, compassionate limits
- Learn to pause instead of reacting immediately

Therapy Modalities

CBT – challenge
irrational
thoughts

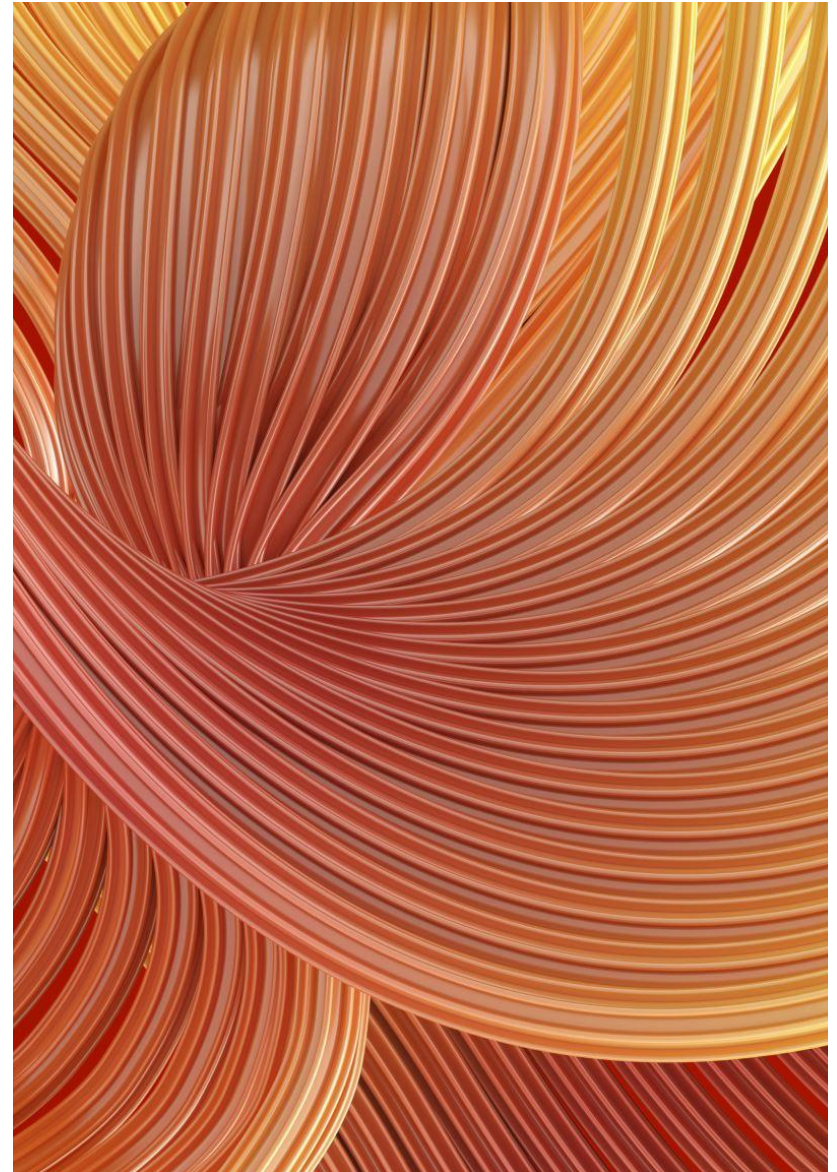
DBT – emotion
regulation skills

ACT – flexibility
+ values

Mindfulness –
observe
thoughts

Family systems
– whole-family
support

Spirituality –
meaning &
connection



The “TRICK” to finding the best fit therapist

These are the important qualities a therapist demonstrates to a client:

T Trust

R Respect

I Interest

C Collaboration

K Kind Compassion



Final takeaways for parents...

Psychotherapy is one important mental health preventive tool but a powerful one under the care of a credentialed mental health professional BUT do ask:

What ages do you treat?

How many years have you been in practice?

How many teens/emerging adults have you treated with some level of suicidal ideation?

Do you have a standard written safety plan if needed?

How do you see the role of parents in treating teens and emerging adults?



Best Practice Guidelines for Parents

Start conversation early

Voluntary process & 3-session contract

Respond constructively if T2T resists...
sense when it is right to move closer or to
step back



Non-Traditional & Wellness Approaches

- MBSR & MBCT programs
- Animal & nature-assisted therapy
- Movement: yoga, martial arts, walking, dance
- 12-step programs & peer support

Mindfulness

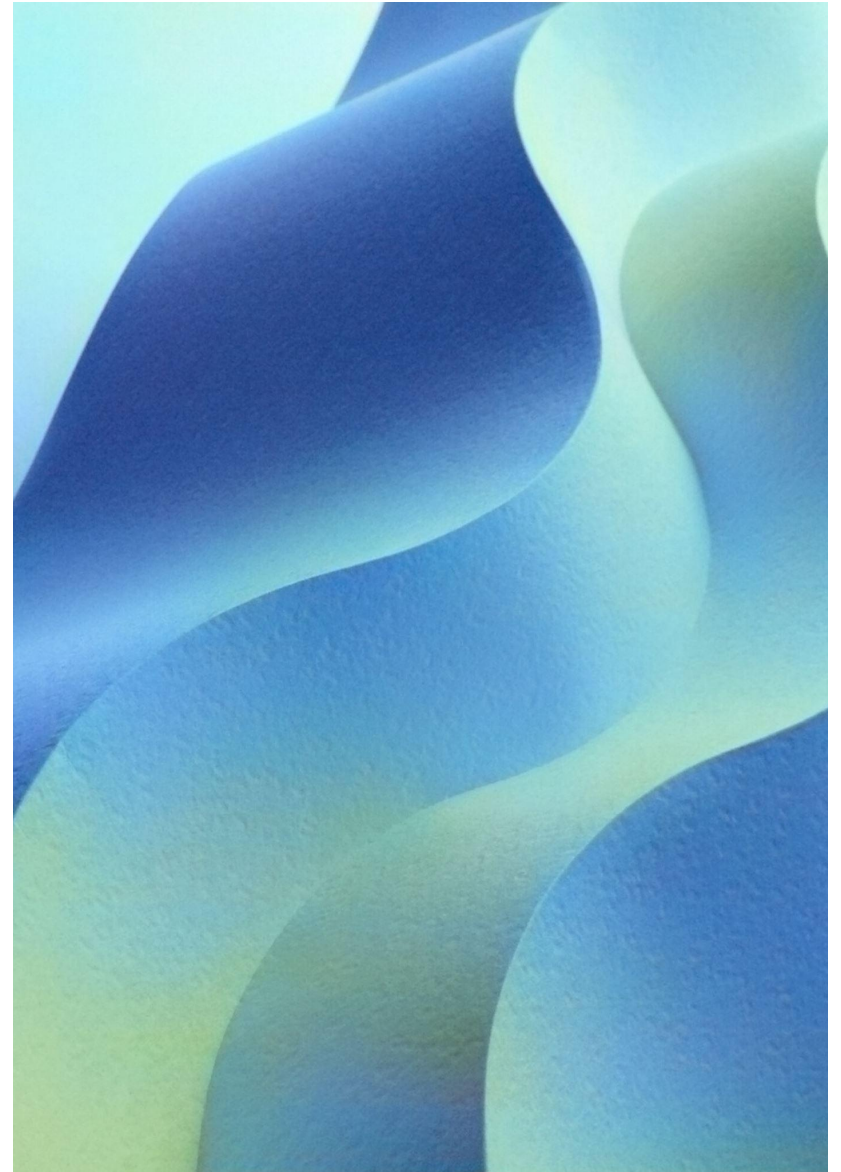
- “Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4)
- “Being fully aware of whatever is happening in the present moment, without the filters or lens of judgment” (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010, p. 16)
- Mindfulness may be a psychological trait, but it’s also a *skill* that can be taught and learned *like any other skill*
- In other words, it’s a *practice*

Buddhist Psychology & Self-Compassion

Healing philosophy, not
psychotherapy

Practices: self-kindness, common
humanity, mindfulness

Exercise: a Compassionate U-turn



A case for the meditative path

thinking as
content
vs.
thinking as
process

“ The day you decide that
you are more interested in
being aware of your thoughts
than you are in the thoughts
themselves – that is the day you
will find your way out. ”

— MICHAEL SINGER

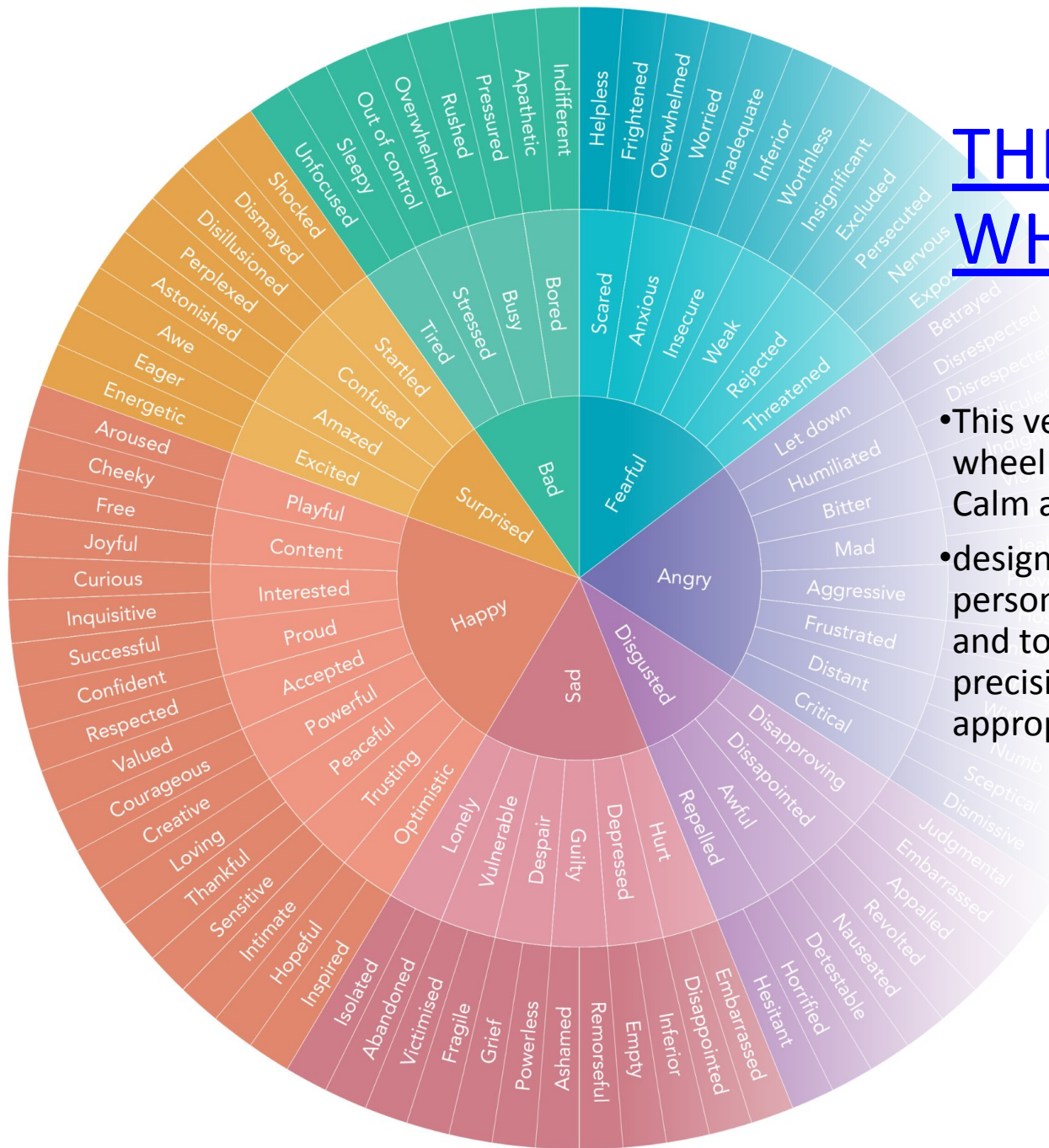
Apps & Online Supports

Mindfulness
apps (Koru,
others)

Online therapy:
BetterHelp,
Talkspace, NOCD

Programs:
YMHFA, Family
Connections

THE FEELINGS WHEEL



- This version of the feelings wheel is what is offered in the Calm app,
- designed to increase a young person's emotional vocabulary and to increase the therapist's precision in responding appropriately.



Resources & Local Supports

- Friendship Bench, Emotions Matter
 - Local volunteer opportunities
 - Crisis lines: Text line, hotlines
- 



•Natural Helpers is a national peer helping program created in 1979 in Seattle, WA. It is based on the idea that a high school teen in crisis is more likely to seek out a trusted peer than an adult. Those chosen to be trained as Natural Helpers represent a cross section of the diverse student cultures within a particular school, and attend a three-day training at a local retreat center typically facilitated by school-based crisis team members. The training uses didactic lectures, role plays, and an emotional whole-group activity called “sharing” to break the bonds of separation between groups and foster an environment where peers watch out for each other under school staff supervision.

•[Click here to watch ... 90 minutes](#)

Natural Helpers (cont'd)

The Natural Helpers program is designed to meet four basic goals:

1. To help young people develop the capability to prevent some of the problems of adolescence
2. To help young people develop the capability to intervene effectively with troubled friends
3. To help young people develop the capability to choose positive ways of taking care of themselves
4. To help young people develop the capability to improve their school and community

Let's talk about A. I.

- What my daughter told AI before she died by suicide...
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/18/opinion/chat-gpt-mental-health-suicide.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>



A second case study on AI and youth suicide

...

- <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/family-teenager-died-suicide-alleges-openai-chatgpt-blame-rcna226147>

Recommended Parent T2Ts Bibliotherapy

The Emotional Life of Teens: Raising Connected, Capable, and Compassionate Adolescents, Lisa Damour, Ph.D., 2024

Good Inside, A Guide on Becoming the Parent You Want to Be, Becky Kennedy, 2022.

Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties, 3rd Edition, Jeffrey Arnett, Ph.D., 2015

Failure to Launch: Why Your Twentysomething Hasn't Grown Up and What To Do About It, Mark McConville, 2021.

The Conscious Parent: Transforming Ourselves, Empowering Our Children, Shefali Tsabary, Ph.D. 2014.

Additional reading...

- **Recommended Books for Parents of Teens & Emerging Adults with BPD**
- • Stop Walking on Eggshells by Paul T. Mason & Randi Kreger
- • The Essential Family Guide to Borderline Personality Disorder by Randi Kreger
- • Loving Someone with Borderline Personality Disorder by Shari Y. Manning, PhD
- • When Your Daughter Has BPD: Essential Skills to Help Families Manage by Daniel S. Lobel, PhD
- • Sometimes I Act Crazy: Living with Borderline Personality Disorder by Jerold J. Kreisman & Hal Straus

I

HATE

Myself

Overcome Self-Loathing and Realize
Why **You're Wrong About You**

Blaise Aguirre, MD

Foreword by JEWEL



Get involved
with family...

- https://afspwalks.donordrive.com/pages/2497?fbclid=IwY2xiawMcDG1leHRuA2FlbQlxMQBicmlkETF2NmVaeEFvRXpjdmF0c0pVAR4kaT4XMgJEIa6EEiGul3OMN5ZnXc6zt6qSEk5JSbBNrWtF2ZWKMbBfwh8XeA_aem_Qk9NWu31JCcgAGZxtEtV6Q

The background of the slide features a blurred image of a road with three red location pins. One pin is in the foreground, and two others are further down the road, creating a sense of depth. The sky is a clear, light blue.

Take-home... Beliefs about BPD

<https://www.drpantaleno.com/bpd-ten-beliefs>



Caring for yourself as a parent...

- Importance of self-care
- Support networks (friends, family, groups)
- Therapy or coaching for parents
- Building resilience & patience

Foreword to I Hate Myself...

Written by Jewel

Grammy-nominated
singer-songwriter,

Humanitarian activist,

And Mental Health advocate

© 2024 John Wiley and Sons

Closing & Call- to-Action

“The best thing we can do for our kids is support them on their wellness journeys.” – Sian Leah Bullock

Contacts:

Barbara Edell Fisher, Ph.D. –
bedellfisher@gmail.com
<https://barbaraedellfisherphd.com/>

Anthony Pantaleno, Ph.D. –
drpantaleno@gmail.com
<https://www.drpantaleno.com/>

Additional Resources

Best Therapy for Teens to Twentysomethings website:

<https://www.findingbesttherapyt2t.com/>

10-minute Compassionate U-turn Practice with Chris Germer

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuOpV_GVkaY

Personal Safety Plan Worksheet

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Mu-ahqmnbcrcpG6yr-rUnaoOJqQjCG22J/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=110724403400788599318&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Bipolar Disorder poem shared at the beginning of the webinar

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TRCi59JySnpmBn2iwZhpUaMOVFqVI7Pw/view?usp=sharing>