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Book Review

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Book Review

Yetta H. Appel & Abraham Matus, co-authors, *Adolescent Suicide Awareness Training Manual*, New Jersey State Department of Education, Trenton, May 1984, 52 pgs.

This short pamphlet deals with the soaring problem of adolescent suicide, how to spot the potential suicide victim and how to help them. It is an excellent introduction and primer on the subject. This awareness manual is meant for all school personnel who are involved directly or indirectly with teenage suicides. However, as it was written for the New Jersey State Department of Education, most of its statistics and its list of community resources relate to New Jersey.

The rate of successful adolescent suicides has doubled in the last 30 years. No teenager is immune. As there is *no* one reason for a person to take his/her own life, there is not one "psychological profile" as to who will commit suicide. Teenage suicides cut across ethnic, economic, educational, sociological and religious lines. Age, race and sex characteristics are not barriers to the danger. The youngest recorded suicide is five years old. (The authors comment sadly that elder Americans have the highest suicide rate of any age group . . . "a most poignant commentary as to the quality of life actually experienced by our elderly population.")

The primer's main strengths are two: its direct, no-nonsense approach to the topic, and the fact that as the authors write in clear, concise English language prose, not in sociological jargon, its message is easily understood. Thus, the reader believes the pamphlet's main purpose is to help troubled adolescents, not be an item on the authors' resumes. For example, to help the reader understand the problem, four pages at the beginning are devoted to debunking various myths about suicide.

The manual alerts educators to the travails of being a teenager. It indicates suicide danger signals, both verbal and behavioral, and other clues. Also family involvement, where the family can obtain assistance for the person with suicidal thoughts, and lastly, how to deal with the aftermath of a successful or unsuccessful attempt. Moreover, there is a four page bibliography to assist the teacher or adviser in obtaining more information.

Teenage suicide will remain a serious problem for years to come. Unfortunately, some rock music glorifies the act. School personnel cannot "bury their heads in the sand" and ignore the problem, hoping it will disappear. As school personnel are the vital link between the family and

the social agency they must plan in advance to handle the event and its effect on others.

The authors should be commended for writing a common-sense, down-to-earth manual. They have put a large amount of information into a few pages. It is a book that should be in every library and be used. This booklet should be read by all school personnel and by parents. It will shock adults out of the complacency that "it can't happen to my child."

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