

A LEADER'S GUIDE TO

Self-help
for teens®

What's the *Big Deal* ABOUT ADDICTIONS?

ANSWERS
and HELP
for TEENS

free spirit
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How to Use This Leader's Guide

What's the Big Deal About Addictions? was written to help teens who are wondering if they might have a problem with addiction, as well as those who have already been identified as having a problem with drugs, alcohol, or various activity addictions. The book can be used by trained personnel in counseling settings in many schools, as well as in outpatient, inpatient, and residential treatment centers, or any place that works with teens who have addiction problems. This leader's guide provides some useful discussion and writing prompts to use along with the book to help the teens you are working with get the most out of it.

My writing of this book was informed by motivational interviewing and harm reduction treatment approaches. Both emphasize the importance of respecting patients and preserving their ability to make choices, rather than talking down to them or threatening consequences. Admittedly, this is more challenging when teens are engaging in behaviors that carry a serious risk of harm.

In a group setting, it is important to tread lightly at first when talking about problems with alcohol, drugs, or other addictive activities. Teens are often used to adults lecturing them about their use. With addiction, you might find that some teens know more than you do about various drugs, alcohol, the latest video games, and the latest social media apps and group chats. Many will likely focus on why their use isn't a problem. The goal is to get teens to think about their use without triggering defensiveness. It can be helpful to ask group members to read sections of the book aloud and follow the reading with a guided discussion using the questions in this guide. Hearing another teen read parts of the book may make the content more relatable and can enhance the entire group's learning.

A common practice among addiction counselors is to double whatever a patient tells you about how much or how frequently they use alcohol or drugs to get a more accurate picture. There is some truth to this, for varying reasons. Teens may not trust you to keep their confidence if they tell you what's really going on. Some are lying to themselves when they underreport their use.

One way to assess the accuracy of what teens report is to ask them toward the end of a session how honest have they been with you (and the group) about their use. Using a 0 to 100 percent scale helps. Follow up by asking: "How important is the stuff you left out?" Ron Taffel talks about this approach in his excellent book *Breaking Through to Teens*, which addresses treatment strategies when working with adolescents.

A Word About Confidentiality

One of the reasons teens are reluctant to share personal information with adults, especially regarding substance use, is their fear that the adult will tell others, particularly their parents. This puts adults working with teens in a difficult position. Knowing where to draw the line between keeping information confidential and deciding that you need to break confidentiality to report more dangerous behaviors is challenging for therapists, school counselors, group facilitators, and other non-counseling professionals. Promising confidentiality only to break it when teens share personal information will result in a loss of trust, which can mean that teens will stop sharing anything at all. This can put them at greater risk.

In leading a discussion or counseling group for this book, it is important to address confidentiality at the start. Ask participants if they understand what confidentiality is and what concerns they may have about what you might have to share with others. Inform them of the limits of confidentiality. This is an ethical requirement for licensed counselors. One limit has to do with thoughts of hurting themselves or others. Let teens know that if they share suicidal feelings, you will need to inform their parents. You can give teens some choice in how this is done, but keeping them safe is essential. The same applies if teens share thoughts or plans to hurt others. Laws and regulations vary from state to state, so if you are not familiar with your state requirements, be sure to review them prior to facilitating teen groups.

Other areas are less clear and should be based on the level of danger as assessed by the facilitator. For example, smoking marijuana occasionally on the weekends is generally less risky than smoking every day. Drinking at a friend's house during a sleepover is less risky than driving home after drinking. One helpful strategy for teens is to have them ask you a hypothetical question. For example, "If someone in the group were to share that they were self-injuring, can you keep that confidential?" This way, you can let the teen know how you would likely respond and they can decide whether to share.

Next, you'll find questions for reflection, discussion, and writing for use with your group. Questions are broken down by chapter and by sections in each chapter to make it easier to go directly to the questions that may be of the most interest to your particular group.



CHAPTER 1: What's the Big Deal About Addictions?

This chapter provides an overview of addiction and helps teens think about their use and consider the possibility that it is or could become a problem.

Casual Use or Addictive Use?, pages 7-8

- What is the difference between casual use and addictive use? Where do you draw the line for yourself?
- What behaviors would you look for that might give you a clue that there is a problem?
- Do you think there's a difference between the amount of alcohol or drugs you use and how often you use in deciding if you have a problem?
- Do you think any of your friends or family members might have a problem? How comfortable would you be talking to them about it?
- What are your thoughts about Bethany's use of marijuana, Nico's use of e-cigarettes, and Maria's use of alcohol? Are they casual users or addicted users?

Even Occasional Use Can Lead to Addiction, pages 8-10

- How long do you think it takes to go from occasional use to problematic use? Days, weeks, months, or years?
- Do you think some drugs are riskier in terms of becoming addicted? Why or why not? Have you made choices about your own use based on your understanding of how addictive a drug might be?
- What do you know about dopamine, the brain chemical that makes things feel more rewarding?

Substance Use Disorder, pages 10-15

- Do the four categories of symptoms of a substance use disorder make sense to you? Are there other symptoms you might add?
- In reading the chart on page 11 that lists the frequency of teen use of alcohol and other drugs, do any of those numbers surprise you? Do they seem accurate based on your experience in your school or neighborhood?

- What are some of the symptoms of a substance use disorder? Do you think a person has to have all the symptoms to be diagnosed with a substance use disorder?
- Which symptoms do you think are a sign of a problem? Do you recognize any of these symptoms in yourself? In family members or friends?
- Have you experienced tolerance or withdrawal symptoms with your use of alcohol or drugs?
- Which of the risk factors for addiction on page 14 do you recognize in yourself?

Benefits of Using Drugs and Alcohol, pages 15–16

- Why would anyone want to use drugs or alcohol anyway?
- What are some of the good things about using drugs and alcohol? How has your use made your life better?
- If you use, why do you use? Is it to relax? To have fun with friends?
- How often do you drink or use drugs alone?
- What benefits would you miss the most if you decided to cut down or stop using alcohol or a particular drug?
- What do you think of the harm reduction model? Is this something that might be helpful for you in deciding what to do about your use?

Consequences of Using Drugs and Alcohol, pages 16–18

- What are the not-so-good things about using drugs and alcohol? What consequences would affect your decisions about using?
- Do you think the benefits of using are worth the risk? Why or why not?
- If you chose to stop using now, how would this affect your relationships with your family members? With your friends?
- Have you ever driven after drinking or using drugs when you probably shouldn't have? What steps can you take to minimize the risk?
- Have you ever used a DD (designated driver)? How well does that work for your group?
- Which of the ways to feel good without drugs and alcohol listed on page 17 would be easiest for you to try? Do you do any of them now? How helpful are they?

Can Teens Use Drugs and Alcohol Responsibly?, pages 18–19

- Do you think teens can use drugs and alcohol responsibly? Why or why not?
- Do you think it's possible for some teens to use responsibly while others can't?
- How responsible are you when using alcohol or drugs? How responsible are your friends?
- What steps might you take that would make you a more responsible user of drugs or alcohol?
- How might your parents answer the question of whether teens can use responsibly? What arguments can you come up with that might convince your parents it's okay for teens to use alcohol and drugs as long as they don't cause any problems?



CHAPTER 2: Alcohol Use—Just the Facts

This chapter reviews facts about alcohol for readers to consider in making decisions about alcohol use.

Types of Alcohol, pages 21–22

- Which types of alcohol do you or your friends use the most?
- Have you found that you react differently depending on whether you drink beer, wine or wine coolers, liquor, canned cocktails such as hard ciders, or other drinks?
- Do you think classifying alcohol as a depressant drug makes sense?

Blood Alcohol Concentration, pages 22–23

- What are some of the factors that affect your blood alcohol concentration?
- Why is letting someone “sleep it off” after passing out from drinking too much alcohol risky?
- Do you think you would be brave enough to call 911 if you feared for a friend’s life, even if you knew you’d get in trouble?

Reasons People Use Alcohol, page 24

- Why do some people choose to drink? What are the main reasons you drink?
- Do you ever drink alone, or do you only drink with friends?
- How much alcohol does it take for you to get a buzz? Do you stop there, or do you always drink until you get drunk?
- How much alcohol does it take for you to get drunk? Has that changed over time?
- Have you ever played drinking games such as beer pong? Does learning about blood alcohol levels change your opinion on drinking games?

Risks of Using Alcohol, pages 24–28

- Does anyone in your family have a problem with alcohol? If so, does this make you more cautious about your own alcohol use?
- Have you ever passed out after drinking too much?

- Have you ever had a blackout where you didn't remember what you did or said while drunk? If so, did you say or do anything embarrassing or that you regretted later?
- Have you ever had sex while under the influence and didn't worry about using protection such as a condom? What might you do if you or your partner got pregnant?
- Do you think that the risks of using alcohol, especially in large amounts, are something you should or shouldn't worry about?
- Can you promise yourself that you would call 911 if you saw someone passed out and were concerned for their safety? How would you decide if you should make that call?

Drinking Responsibly, pages 28–30

- What steps might you take to make sure you drink responsibly if you do decide to drink?
- How comfortable would you be taking the keys from a friend if you believed they were too drunk to drive?
- Would you drive home drunk to avoid having to call a parent to come pick you up?
- What do you think of Moderation Management on page 30? Is this an approach you think could help you?



CHAPTER 3: Drug Use—Just the Facts

This chapter addresses a variety of different drugs, including medications prescribed for specific disorders. Information about types of drugs as well as the individual drugs people use is included.

What Is a Drug?, pages 32–33

- Many teens think that since marijuana grows naturally, it shouldn't be considered a drug. What do you think and why? How about magic mushrooms or peyote?
- Would you be more willing to use a “natural” drug such as marijuana than you would be to use a prescribed drug, such as Prozac, for anxiety or depression? Why is that?

What Is Drug Abuse?, pages 33–34

- Have you ever taken medication that wasn't prescribed for you, such as painkillers or stimulants (e.g., Adderall)? Were you at all worried about the effect that it might have on you?
- Have you ever shared your medication with friends? Do you think this is risky to do? Why or why not?

Types of Drugs People Abuse, pages 34–37

- What are some of the more popular drugs in your circle or at your school? How hard are they to get?
- Do you use energy drinks? Are you aware of the risks of using energy drinks after reading this chapter? Might that affect how often you use them in the future?

Specific Drugs People Abuse, pages 37–55

- Which of the drugs in this section have you tried? What did you learn about these drugs after reading this section?
- Are there some listed in this section you haven't tried but would like to try?
- Which drugs would you never try, even if they were offered to you?
- How do you make decisions about which drugs you think are safe for you to use?

- Have you ever used CBD? Do you think it's safe to use? Why or why not?
- How common is vaping at your school or in your neighborhood? What are your thoughts about it?

Drugs and the Legal System, pages 55–58

- How concerned are you about the legal consequences of using drugs?
- Does the legality of a drug affect your decision to use or not use it?
- How might your parents react if you got arrested for using or selling drugs? How might an arrest affect your future?
- What do you think about differences in arrest rates among different racial groups?
- Do you think you or your friends are at greater risk of getting arrested because of your race or ethnic origin?
- Do you think marijuana should be legalized or decriminalized in the United States? Why or why not?
- Do you know anyone who has overdosed? How would you handle it if this happened to you or someone you were with?
- Do you know of any famous people who have overdosed? What are your thoughts about that? What effect, if any, might their stories have on your decisions about your own use?

Other Concerns About Drug Use, pages 58–59

- How has your drug use affected your relationships with family members? Your grades? Your friendships?
- Have you ever lost a friendship or relationship because the other person didn't like your use of drugs? If so, how did you react?
- How might these other concerns influence your decisions about using drugs?



CHAPTER 4: Tech (Electronics) Addictions

Tech use is common among teens. This chapter looks at various types of electronics and some of the problems that can develop with overuse.

Use of Electronic Devices, pages 61–62

- How much time each day do you spend on electronic devices? Do you think your use is a problem?
- Do your parents complain about your use of electronics? If so, do you think they are overreacting?
- How often do you multitask? Do you think multitasking helps or hurts your ability to do your homework, for example?

Gaming Addiction, pages 62–66

- What are your favorite video games?
- Do you play video games by yourself, with friends, or both?
- How many hours a day do you spend playing?
- How does your gaming affect your family life? Are there often arguments about getting off the game to come to dinner, do chores, or complete your schoolwork?
- Does gaming after a stressful day help lower your stress or ramp it up so that you're angrier or more stressed than you were when you started?
- What do you think about the effects of playing violent video games, such as first-person shooter games?
- Do you think you might be addicted to gaming? How many of the signs on pages 64–65 do you recognize in yourself? Would you consider asking your parents or guardians about what they think?

Phone Addiction, pages 66–68

- Do you sleep with your phone? Respond to texts or notifications in the middle of the night?
- Have you ever had your parents take your phone? How did you react? Might your reaction be a sign of addiction? Why or why not?

- Do you feel you always have to respond to group chats? Why or why not?
- Have you ever texted or responded to texts while driving? Have you had any close calls, for example hitting another car, as a result? How bad would you feel if you got into an accident and hurt or killed someone as a result of texting while driving?
- Is it hard to sit through dinner with your family without your phone?
- Which, if any, of the possible signs of phone addiction on pages 66–67 do you recognize in yourself?

Social Media Addiction, pages 68–70

- How often are you on social media? How many hours a day would you estimate you're on it?
- Does your mood worsen if you don't get as many likes or hearts on your posts?
- Do you post things that could cause trouble for you if they were shared with others?
- Does social media get in the way of living your life and having fun with friends?
- Have you ever found out through social media that you were excluded from a get-together with friends? How did you feel about this and how did you react? Have you hurt someone's feelings by not including them in an event you were invited to or hosted?

Cyberbullying, pages 70–71

- Has anyone posted embarrassing pictures of you without your permission? How did that feel?
- Have you posted things that would embarrass someone you know for fun or out of anger? How did that person react?
- How comfortable would you be letting your parents or school officials know that you were cyberbullied? Would you be afraid of the consequences? How would you start that talk?

Other Problems Associated with Electronics Addictions, pages 71–72

- How does your electronics use affect the amount of exercise you get? The amount of sleep you get?
- If you had to choose between playing video games and going on a hike with a friend, which would you choose and why?
- Do you think you could go 24 hours without looking at your phone or other electronic devices? Why or why not?

Recovering from Electronics Addictions, pages 72-73

- If you think you have a problem with electronics addiction, what steps are you willing to take to make it better? Would you try any apps to help you limit your use?
- What non-electronics-focused activities listed on page 17 would you be willing to try in cutting back on your electronics use?



CHAPTER 5: Other Activity Addictions

This chapter addresses behaviors that have the potential to become addictive or develop into disorders.

Addiction or Bad Habit?, page 75

- Do you think it makes sense to think of behaviors as addictions? Why or why not?
- What do you think about the examples of Kai, Milan, and Jordan on page 74? Do you think their behaviors are serious enough to be labelled an addiction?

Food Addiction, pages 76-79

- How much control do you have over your eating habits?
- Which of the symptoms noted on page 77 do you recognize in yourself, if any?
- Do you ever use food as a way to feel better when you're upset or lonely? Does it work?
- What messages do you get from your family about food and weight?

Sex and Love Addictions, pages 79-81

- Have you ever used a hook-up or dating app on your phone? Which ones? Have you ever met anyone by using the app? If so, how did that go? Did you take any steps to make sure it was a safe situation?
- Do you have a strong need to be in a relationship? Why or why not?
- In relationships, do you typically pick people that treat you well or people that mistreat you? What would it take for you to decide to break up with someone who is mistreating you? Who might support you in that decision?
- What do you think of the idea of waiting until you know someone before having sex with them? Is that realistic for you? Why or why not?

Porn Addiction, pages 81–83

- Have you ever looked at porn online? What did you think about it when you first saw it?
- If you look at porn, how often do you do it? How many minutes or hours at a time will you watch it? Have you ever seen anything that was disturbing to you?
- Do you think what you see in porn is how real people act when they hook up? Why or why not?
- Has your use of porn caused any problems in your relationships?

Sexting Addiction, pages 83–84

- Have you ever sexted? What was your reason for doing so?
- Have you ever felt pressured to send revealing pictures by someone else, such as a significant other? If so, what did you do?
- If you have sent revealing pictures, do you ever regret it? Why or why not? Do you know if the person you sexted has shared your photos or messages with others? How would you react if that happened?
- What would you do if a friend texted you inappropriate pictures of themselves or someone else? Would you report it? Why or why not?

Self-Injury Addiction, pages 84–85

- Do you know anyone who cuts, burns, or otherwise hurts themselves on purpose?
- Is this something you have tried? Did it help you feel better, and if so, how long did that last? Did you try to hide the injuries by wearing long pants or sleeves or injuring yourself in places no one will see?
- Do you think that self-injury can be addictive? Why or why not?
- How concerned would you be if you found out a friend or partner was self-injuring? What might you say or do?

Shopping Addiction, page 86

- Do you like to shop? Where do you do most of your shopping? What do you spend most of your money on?
- How excited do you get when you buy something new?
- Do you think you get obsessed with items you want to buy? Do you think our society encourages shopping? Why or why not?

- Do you spend money as soon as you get it? How do you think this could cause problems for you in the near future? As an adult?
- Does anyone in your family have trouble with money, such as buying things they can't really afford? What problems does this cause for them?

Gambling and Betting Addiction, pages 87–88

- Have you ever bet on something, such as a sports event or a card game?
- Have you ever spent more than you intended to when gambling or betting because you were losing and wanted to get your money back? What happened?
- Do you have family members or friends who are gamblers? Have they gotten themselves in trouble as a result?
- Is gambling or betting something you think could become a problem for you? How might you handle it?



CHAPTER 6: Getting Help with Addictions

This chapter reviews how treatment can help in overcoming addictions.

The Stages of Recovery, pages 90–93

- What are your thoughts about the teen examples on page 90? Can you relate to any of them?
- Which of the six stages of recovery do you think you are in? Are you in different stages with different addictive behaviors?

Deciding If You Are Ready to Quit, pages 93–94

- How would you respond to the questions on page 93?
- What are your pros and cons for quitting and not quitting? (*You can also ask group members to make a chart similar to the one on page 94. See who is willing to share their list.*)

The Recovery Process, page 94

- How hard has it been for you to stop using if you have stopped? If you haven't stopped, how hard do you think it would be to quit using drugs or alcohol or other addictive behaviors?
- What do you think your chances are for relapsing?

Withdrawal, pages 95–96

- Have you ever experienced withdrawal symptoms when you tried to cut down or stop your use of drugs or alcohol? How bad were they?
- What could you do to help yourself get through withdrawal?

Types of Treatment, pages 96–101

- Have you ever been in treatment? How well do you think it worked for you?
- If you haven't been in treatment, which type of treatment do you think would work best for you and why?

- Would you be more comfortable in group therapy or individual therapy?
- What reservations do you have about treatment? How willing would you be to give it a try, even if you don't think you need it or that it would help?
- What is confidentiality?
- Would you trust a therapist to keep what you say confidential?
- Would you be willing to take medication if a counselor or therapist recommended it? Why or why not?

Support Groups and Self-Help Groups, pages 102–106

- What might be some advantages of going to a support group such as AA?
- Have you ever been to a support group meeting? What was it like?
- If you've never been to a support group meeting, would you consider going to one? Why or why not? Do you think it would be easier if a friend went with you?
- What do you think of the idea of making amends? How hard would this be for you?
- What do you think about the alternatives to 12-step support groups, such as Rational Recovery and Smart Recovery?

Co-Occurring Mental Health Disorders, pages 106–107

- Have you been diagnosed with any non-addiction disorders, such as ADHD, anxiety, or depression? Are you taking any medication for them?
- Have you used drugs or alcohol while taking medication for a diagnosed disorder such as ADHD, anxiety, or depression? Have you let your prescribing doctor know about that?
- What are some of the risks of using drugs or alcohol while taking medication for another disorder?

A Word of Caution, and Hope, page 107

- How confident are you that you can beat your addiction?
- What could happen that would make it more likely for you to be successful?
- What can you say to yourself that will boost your motivation to overcome your addiction?



CHAPTER 7: Preventing Relapse

This chapter explains the relapse process—how to identify signs of relapse and how to respond when a relapse occurs.

Relapse or Recurrence of Symptoms?, pages 108–110

- What do you think about the idea of relapse, recurrence of symptoms, and slips? Do you think it matters what you call it?
- What are your pro-addiction and pro-recovery thoughts?

The Relapse Process: Identifying Triggers and Warning Signs, pages 110–114

- What are your triggers or warning signs of relapse? What goes through your mind when you start thinking of wanting to use again? Which triggers do you think are the most important for you to focus on?
- How can you keep your personal triggers in mind so that you can respond quickly when they occur?
- Do you think remembering the word HALT for some of the more common triggers—**hungry**, **angry**, **lonely**, or **tired**—would help you keep them in your mind?
- How would you go about talking to a friend with an addiction about their getting help? (*You can have group members role-play these conversations.*)

Finding Healthy Substitutes for Addictions, pages 114–115

- Do you think boredom makes it harder to avoid relapse? Why or why not?
- How often do you wish that you could just go back to your addiction and keep it under control this time? What are the chances of this succeeding, based on what has happened in the past? Are the risks of relapsing worth the benefits?
- What are some healthy substitutes for addictions that would work well for you? Who in your life might support these substitutes and do them with you? Which substitutes would you want to do on your own?

Learning to Manage Your Emotions, pages 115–119

- Which emotions are the hardest for you to handle? Anger? Sadness? Anxiety? Why?
- Do you agree that changing how you think about a situation determines how you feel about it?
- Would you be willing to share an example of when the ABC model might be helpful to you?
- Do you think that the idea of having your emotional mind, your reasonable mind, and your wise mind could help you manage your inner dialogue?
- Which thoughts do you have that can help you manage your feelings more constructively?

Building Your Social Support System, pages 119–120

- Which of your friends would support you in wanting to recover from addiction? Which friends do you think would encourage you to keep using?
- Do you think any of your friends who use would be willing to join you in attending a recovery meeting?
- Which friends are you willing to give up if that's what it takes to overcome your addiction? Which "people, places, and things" should you be careful about?
- Do you think having a code word or safe word with your family would help you escape a risky situation? Do you think your family would help you with this?

Pursuing a Healthier Lifestyle, pages 120–122

- Exercise, sleep, and diet are some of the most important lifestyle changes you can make to support yourself in your recovery. Which of these might be the most challenging for you and why?
- What are your thoughts about the Healthy Eating Plate on page 122? Did any part of that surprise you? Can you think of some diet changes you might be willing to make when you compare the Healthy Eating Plate with what you normally eat?

Other Coping Strategies for Preventing Relapse, pages 123–131

- What do you think about the Addictive Voice Recognition Technique? How might that work for you?
- Have you experienced euphoric recall? What do you think is the best way to deal with that?
- Can you give an example of finishing the story and how that might help you? What about urge surfing?

- Which of your thoughts might benefit from fact-checking?
- Have you been guilty of switching seats on the Titanic—picking a different drug or activity in place of the one you are addicted to? Do you think this is a safe approach for you, knowing yourself and your addiction?
- Have you ever practiced mindfulness? (*You might have group members practice a couple mindfulness exercises during your session.*)
- How easy is it for you to be assertive with others? How would this be a useful skill in recovery?

Honesty Is the Best Policy, page 131

- How difficult will it be for you to stay honest about your addiction and recovery—with your parents, teachers, probation officers (if you're in trouble with the law), or therapists?
- Do you think it's possible to recover if you are not being honest about your addiction?

Drug Testing, pages 131-132

- Have you ever been drug tested? How does it feel to have to take a drug test?
- Have you even taken steps to try to beat a drug test? Has it worked? What might be the risks of trying to beat a drug test?

Handling a Slip or Relapse, pages 132-133

- When did you first start thinking of using again? What thoughts were going through your head? What feelings were you having at the time? What kept you from slipping earlier? Who was with you when it happened?
- How hard are you on yourself when you slip or relapse? How have others, such as your parents or friends, reacted when you slip or relapse?
- What can you do differently in the future to help reduce the chances of relapse?

Taking It Day by Day, page 133

- Does the idea of overcoming addiction overwhelm you? What is your biggest fear about it?
- How do you think overcoming addiction will help you now and in the future?
- How might your relationships change if you overcome your addiction? What skills might you learn?
- What do you know about yourself that can give you the strength to overcome your addiction?



A Concluding Note

- If you decide that you are ready to get help, who would you tell first and why?
- How would you bring this up with your parents or guardians?
- How helpful has today's session been for you? What did you learn that you didn't know before? Is there anything you wish we had discussed but didn't?
- Do you have any feedback for me (the leader) or anyone in the group that you'd like to share?

About the Author

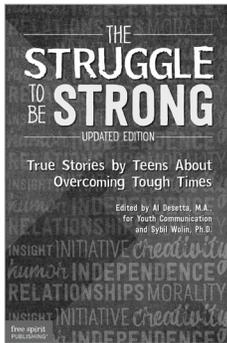


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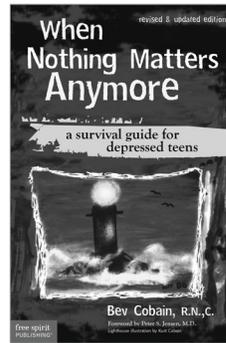
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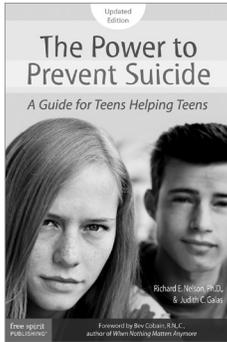
Other Great Resources from Free Spirit



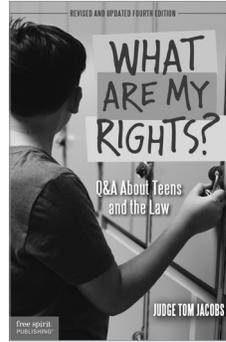
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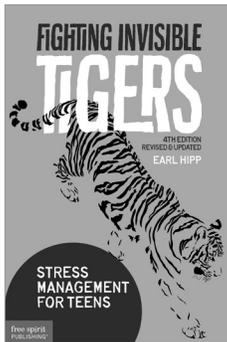
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