

Sometimes When I'm Sad

Deborah Serani

Kyra Teis, Illustrator

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Distilling anhedonia to its essence, Sometimes When I'm Sad's calm approach to educating children and adults invites discussions.

Deborah Serani's clearcut, holistic picture book *Sometimes When I'm Sad* introduces childhood depression and coping strategies with helpful tips for caregivers.

In this succinct story, a boy experiences more than everyday sadness. He cries, hides, throws toys, is uninterested in presents and ice cream, and is sometimes listless and tired. A visit to the counselor helps him to learn that it's normal to feel sad sometimes, and that there are ways to talk about sadness and alleviate it, from drawing to heading outdoors.

Without naming specific mood disorders, or what led the boy to his current state, the book is open-ended enough to span a variety of situations. It's free of complicated clinical terms, too. The text is laid out like a board book, with short, pointed lines, like "Sometimes when I'm sad, I want to sleep all day," and repetitions that build soothing rhythms. Though the boy depicted is older than a typical board book audience, this spare approach distills anhedonia to its essence.

Kyra Teis's graceful artwork uses subtle lavenders and grays to convey sadness. Brighter colors are introduced as the pages progress, tracking the boy's gradual return to feeling better. Teis illustrates concepts with creative interpretations, as with using different sized balloons when the story discusses that "sometimes sadness can get so big that it takes up all the space where happiness should be."

Instructive back matter geared at adults details signs to watch for in kids, from infants and preschoolers who are too young to verbalize their feelings, all the way up to school-age children. Concrete suggestions for making a supportive home environment focus on the senses, such as allowing for natural light and exploring aromatherapy and soundscapes. Such advice gives adults steps to try, while also acknowledging that sometimes professional intervention is needed. A list of mental health and parenting resources concludes the book.

Sometimes When I'm Sad is an effective pediatric wellness title that identifies concerning behaviors. Its calm approach to educating children and adults invites discussion.

KAREN RIGBY (May 27, 2020)

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