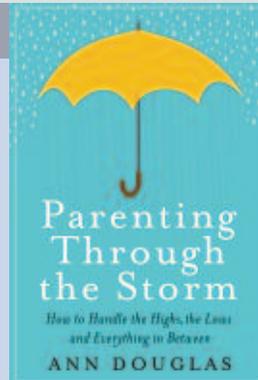


OFF THE VANIER BOOKSHELF

CINDY GRAHAM

Parenting Through the Storm

Ann Douglas.
Toronto: HarperCollins
Canada, 2015.



Douglas provides evidence-based advice to parents of children with mental health, behavioural or neurodevelopmental disorders.

An estimated one in five schoolchildren live with “invisible” conditions: mental health, behavioural or neurodevelopmental disorders serious enough to adversely affect their relationships at home, at school and in their community. Parents of these children often face a great degree of difficulty in identifying and managing their child’s condition while also handling everyday family responsibilities. In *Parenting Through the Storm: How to Handle the Highs, Lows and Everything in Between*, Canadian author Ann Douglas reaches out to these parents with a thorough guide designed to help them through every step of their unique parenting experience – aiming to make this journey “a little less lonely and a lot less overwhelming.”

Parenting Through the Storm provides parents with evidence-based advice to guide them through suspicion of a disorder, assessment and diagnosis, advocating for their child and personal recovery. Douglas outlines the challenges they may face within their family, their child’s schools and the broader community while providing a holistic perspective on the issues, feelings, concerns, potential obstacles and new possibilities that parents will experience going forward.

Given that parents often face lengthy wait times accessing treatment within a mental health system that is fragmented among multiple jurisdictions, the book emphasizes *practical steps* caregivers can take to help their children and their families thrive on a daily basis before, during and following treatment. Family strategies outlined by Douglas include record-keeping for advocacy purposes, personal stress management skills and preventing a child’s illness from eclipsing self-care and other personal relationships. She explains how lifestyle factors such as sleep, exercise, play and diet can affect children’s mental health and the ability to manage their challenges.

Douglas’s book emphasizes the critical role of parents, who are usually the front-line guardians of their children’s growth as they await and participate in treatment. Despite the important role parents play, studies have shown that one-quarter of parents would feel embarrassed if anyone found out that their child was suffering from mental health problems – a stigma

that can delay parents from getting the treatment their children need and thus foster a sense of isolation. Douglas, however, stresses that parents of children with mental health disorders are *not alone*, as her book makes clear to the reader.

Parenting Through the Storm contains valuable practical advice about finding support within communities and information about provincial and territorial respite care policies. Equally important, Douglas adds narrative depth by recounting the stories of other parents who are raising (or have raised) children with various conditions – stories backed by interviews with children’s mental health experts and the experiences of Douglas herself, whose own children were diagnosed with various disorders at a young age and are now thriving as young adults.

With an emphasis on clarity and breadth, *Parenting Through the Storm* enhances parents’ understanding of mental, behavioural or neurodevelopmental disorders, as well as the ability to manage family responsibilities in this context. Useful resources include a directory of terms, a directory of published resources, a directory of online resources and a directory of disorders. As Douglas acknowledges, “the families of children with a mental illness are facing a storm of stress, heartache, worry and hard work.” Fortunately for parents in these families, her newest work provides knowledge and advice that will help them weather this storm. ♥

Cindy Graham is a professional writer living in Ottawa.



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