

Children's Books on Mental Health

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We all know how important physical health is, but equally important is mental health. In fact, our mental health can often affect our physical health. For too long, mental illness has been stigmatized in our society, and it is time that changes. People, especially children, need to feel safe to express whatever they are feeling without the fear of being judged negatively. It is vital children know that help is there, if needed, and feel comfortable to ask for it. These middle grade novels cover the topic of mental health in an engaging and helpful way.

Guts by Raina Telgemeier is the third book in the graphic novel series *Smile*. The book deals with the author's childhood experiences with anxiety. One night, Raina wakes up with a terrible stomach ache. She thinks it's some kind of bug, until she realizes the stomach ache comes any time she is worried about something. Another book that tackles anxiety is *Some Kind of Happiness* by Claire Legrand. In this fantasy and realistic fiction novel, Finley Hart struggles with anxiety and depression. Sent to live with her grandparents, whom she has never met, her only solace is Everwood, an imaginary forest kingdom in her notebook. Only it turns out it isn't imaginary. It exists behind her grandparents' house. Finley sets out on a mission to save the dying Everwood, but first she must save herself.

In *The Science of Breakable Things* by Tae Keller, Natalie's botanist mom is suffering from depression. Natalie wants to help her mom feel better, and decides to enter an egg drop competition. If she wins, she's going to use the prize money to fly her mom to see the Cobalt Blue Orchids, flowers that survive against impossible odds. Her hope is the flowers will inspire her mom to want to live again. *What Happens Next* by Claire Swinarski deals with the topic of eating disorders. Astronomy lover Abby McCourt's older sister, Blair, was sent away to receive treatment for an eating disorder. In order to distract herself from her sister's absence, Abby teams up with a visiting astronomer to help find his long-lost telescope. She thinks this will take her mind off the distance between her and Blair, but, in fact, it might bring them closer together.

Good Enough by Jen Petro-Roy also addresses the topic of eating disorders. 12-year-old Riley is being treated for anorexia. She's doing well until her roommate starts to break the rules, triggering old behaviors, and blackmailing her into silence. She realizes recovery is going to be harder than she thought, and she worries that when she leaves the treatment center, she'll fall back into old habits. *OCDaniel* by Wesley King tells the story of Daniel, a boy who has OCD. He hopes no one notices, especially this pretty girl named Raya. Then one day Daniel gets a mysterious note signed Fellow Star Child, and becomes swept up in a mystery that might change everything for him. *Fighting Words* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley is the story of sisters, Della and Suki. Della has always had Suki to take care of her, and protect her. When their mother went to prison, and when the girls went from foster home to foster home after being removed from

their mother's boyfriend's care, Della always had Suki. Della is now starting to realize, though, that no one protected Suki, and when the realization of how deep her sister's PTSD and depression goes, Della is willing to fight for her sister the way Suki always fought for Della.

Please visit or call the Rizzo Children's Library at 201-891-4866, x3 for suggestions on finding great reads for children of all ages, and ask about joining one of our book clubs for children in grades 1-5.