THE JOURNEY TO NORMAL

WHAT IS NORMAL, ANYWAY?
THE JOURNEY TO NORMAL

We can be humorous...

“Normal is a setting on the dryer.”
Erma Bombeck

“I tried to be normal once. It was the worst 60 seconds of my life.”

“...is broke, over-scheduled, and worn out.”

We can get serious. Normal...

“...People say they want to be normal, but what I really hear is that they are desiring something someone else displays as ideal.”

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When it comes to normal for teens, things get even more interesting...

“Being a teen is a lot like being in menopause. Hormones are all over the place, so trying to make sense of them is like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall.”
THE JOURNEY TO NORMAL

WHAT IS NORMAL, ANYWAY?

Who defines it?

“Normal" is a relative term.

What’s normal for me may not be normal for you.

To a large degree, it depends on the lens or standard through which we look.
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WHAT IS NORMAL, ANYWAY?

Who’s Normal?
  Aaron - age 8
  Madison - age 10
  Jake - age 14
  Camille - age 16
Normal According to Who?

1. Society’s Definition Normal
2. Satan’s Definition of Normal
3. God’s Standards
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SOCIETY’S DEFINITION OF NORMAL
THE JOURNEY TO NORMAL

WHAT IS NORMAL, ANYWAY?

Society’s Definition of Normal
• Society and culture have a heavy influence.
• It’s the middle ground of what appears to be acceptable.

**The problem is, our children’s brains are NO more developed or ready to face the stresses that are being presented to them than we were at their age. So much of what they face is Not Normal.
WHAT IS NORMAL, ANYWAY?

Society’s Definition of Normal (cont.)

Peer Pressure - A near-universal normal for kids

Kids look to friends for validation, instead of to the family who knows them best, loves them most, and has the wisdom to guide them.

Peer pressure and social norms are powerful influences in behavior, and they are classic excuses.

Andrew Lansley
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SATAN’S DEFINITION OF NORMAL
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WHAT IS NORMAL, ANYWAY?

Satan’s Definition of Normal

Some of the major issues facing kids today demonstrate the kind of things the enemy would like our kids to see as “normal,” either to do or to accept:

• Bullying, Cyberbullying, cyberstalking
• TV Violence/Internet Gaming Violence
• Pre-marital sex at younger ages; Sex trafficking
• Abortion
• Cheating to handle the pressure to get good grades
• Depression and Suicide
• Drugs and Alcohol
WHAT IS NORMAL, ANYWAY?

God’s Definition of Normal

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

*Proverbs 22:6 (ESV)*

God’s Normal never changes: in fact, He says do NOT conform to this world.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

*Romans 12:2*
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WHAT IS NORMAL, ANYWAY?

God’s Definition of Normal (cont.)
No “cookie cutter Christians”
Unique personalities, gifts, talents

“In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well.”

Romans 12:6

Do not judge others because their “normal” falls outside our comfort zone.

Jesus looked past the societal expectations of the day, concerned with the need of only one.
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GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN WHAT IS NORMAL
"What is tolerated in one generation will be accepted in the next."
MY CURFEW WAS LIGHTNING BUGS,
MY PARENTS DIDN’T CALL MY CELL,
THEY YELLED MY NAME,
I PLAYED OUTSIDE,
NOT ONLINE,
AND IF I DIDN’T EAT WHAT MAMA COOKED,
I DIDN’T EAT.
GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN WHAT IS NORMAL

Family Life/Divorce
Some General Statistics

- Increasingly fewer US children are living in “traditional” families (two heterosexual parents in their first marriage).

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1960</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>2014</th>
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<td></td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>46%</td>
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GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN WHAT IS NORMAL

No One at Home

<table>
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<th>Percent of mothers in the workforce</th>
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<td>1860</td>
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<td>1980</td>
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- Youth are increasingly alone → more opportunity for drinking, drugs, sex, violent video gaming and tv watching with friends right in their own home.
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GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN WHAT IS NORMAL

Education

• Grades = an increasing stressor for college bound

• Dropouts
  ▪ Decreasing, yet 1.2 million U.S. students drop out of high school annually.
  ▪ A high school dropout is likely to earn $200,000 less over his lifetime when compared to a high school graduate.
  ▪ High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested during their lifetime.
Runaways and homelessness

• Between 1.6 and 2.8 million U.S. adolescents run away annually.

• ~47% of teens runaways report significant conflict between their parents.

• Homelessness among students of all grades, rose 72% between 2007-2012 (National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)).

• In 2014, ~100,000 US children were sold into sex trafficking; many were runaways.

• ~76% of transactions for sex with underage girls start on the internet.
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GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN WHAT IS NORMAL

Screen Time

• Many youth spend up to 20 hours a day, seven days a week in front of a computer.

• Youth report spending an average of 7.5 hrs/day using entertainment media \(\text{\textit{according to the Kaiser Family Foundation}}\).

• Among those hours, 4.5 hours are devoted to TV and 1.5 hours are spent using the computer, and the other 30 minutes is spent playing video games.

❖ By comparison, their parents had 3 channels on the TV, a corded home phone, and no personal computer.
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GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN WHAT IS NORMAL

Increase of on-screen violence

• By age 12, the average child has witnessed tens of thousands of acts of violence on TV and games.

• The simulation in today’s video games is real enough that children with no prior access to real handguns have successfully shot and killed their victims the first time they had access to real weapons.
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GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN WHAT IS NORMAL

School Bullying – a serious issue for students & their families

- 30% of US teens have been a bully or been bullied
- Every 7 minutes, a child is bullied in the school setting.
- In 2001, 14% of 12-18yo students reported being bullied but between 2007-2011 it hovered around 30%
Cyber Bullying and Cyber Stalking

• The Internet has made Cyber Bullying one of the major issues teens face today, and the number of Cyber Stalking cases has increased dramatically in the last several years.

• In 8 years (2007-2015), Cyber Bullying increased from 18.8% to 34%.

• Social media networks allow bullies to enlist help from others and publicize information about their victim.

• Victims can be bullied anytime and from anywhere.
OTHER ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR TODAY’S TEENS
By 12\textsuperscript{th} Gr., 50\% of youth have abused an illicit drug at least once.

The most commonly used drug is marijuana but adolescents can find many abused substances, such as prescription medications, glues, and aerosols, in the home.

Tobacco

- Although tobacco use by adolescents has declined substantially in the last 40 years, nearly 1 in 15 high school seniors was a daily smoker in 2014.
OTHER ISSUES: DRUG AND OTHER SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN TODAY’S YOUTH

Marijuana
- Even though buying and using marijuana is illegal, teen use is at its highest in 30 years, with teens more likely to use marijuana than tobacco. In 2011, 1 in 8 8th graders, 1 in 4 10th graders, and 1 in 3 12th graders used pot in the past year.

Vicodin
- Vicodin is one of the drugs most commonly abused by adolescents.
- In 2008, 15.4% of 12th graders reported using a prescription drug for non-medical purposes in the last year.
OTHER ISSUES: RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOR IN TODAY’S YOUTH

• The 2007 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated that over a 30 day span:
  ▪ 29.1% of high school students surveyed had ridden in a car with a DRIVER who had been drinking alcohol
  ▪ 18% had carried a weapon

• Over a 12 month span
  ▪ 75% had drunk alcohol
OTHER ISSUES: RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOR IN TODAY’S TEENS

Kids and Sex

• The prevalence of sex in movies, TV shows and magazines as well as on the Internet has made blatant sexuality more commonplace than it used to be.

• In a CDC 2011 survey, 47% of high school students reported being sexually active.

• Almost 40% said they had not used a condom during their last sexual encounter and 77% didn’t use birth control pills or Depo-Provera.
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OTHER ISSUES: MENTAL HEALTH AND TODAY’S TEENS

MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

• One in 5 teens/young adults suffers from a mental health condition.

• 1/2 of all chronic mental illness begins by age 14, and 3/4 by age 24.

• At any point in time, 1 in every 10 children and adolescents are affected by serious emotional disturbances.

• 20-30% of adolescents have one major depressive episode before adulthood.
OTHER ISSUES: DEPRESSION IN YOUTH ~ SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sudden, abrupt changes in mood or personality
- Expressions of hopelessness and despair
- Decreased attention, energy
- Declining grades and school performance
- Lack of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Increased irritability and aggressiveness
- Withdrawal from family, friends and relationships
- Lack of hygiene
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
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SUICIDE AND TODAY’S TEENS
SUICIDE AND TODAY’S TEENS

Statistics

• **1 of every 13** US youth **attempted** suicide in the previous 12 months *(CDC and Prevention’s 2013 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey).*

• An average of over **5,400 suicide attempts** are made by 7th-12th grade US teens **daily**.

• Suicide is the **2nd leading cause of death** for ages 10-24, second only to accidents *(2013 CDC).*

• More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease **COMBINED**.

• **4 of 5 completed** suicides give **clear warning signs** of their intentions. *Knowing the signs could help 80% considering suicide.*
Signs and Concerns—Just Being a Teen or Something More?

- Many times, signs of concern mimic “typical teenage behaviors.” If the signs are persisting over a period of time, several of the signs appear at the same time, and the behavior is “out of character” for the young person as you know him/her, then close attention is warranted.

- Anytime you have a concern about a young person’s actions and/or behaviors, be proactive – have a conversation with the child. Seek professional help, if necessary.

- Suicide Threats: Take either Direct or Indirect Statements seriously
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SUICIDE AND TODAY’S TEENS

Signs and Concerns (cont.)

• People who talk about suicide, threaten suicide or call suicide crisis lines are 30 times more likely than average to kill themselves. Take suicide threats seriously.

• Suicide threats are not always verbal (i.e. texts, social media)

• Previous Suicide Attempts
  ▪ 1 of 3 suicide deaths is not the individual’s 1st attempt.
  ▪ The risk for completing suicide is more than 100 times greater during the first year after an attempt.
  ▪ Take any instance of deliberate self-harm seriously.
Signs and Concerns (cont.)

- **Preoccupation or Obsession** with death or suicide
  - Essays, poems, writing, artwork, drawings about or depicting death

- **Final Arrangements** - Once the decision has been made to end their life, some begin making final arrangements (giving away possessions, saying goodbye, making funeral arrangements).
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SUICIDE AND TODAY’S TEENS

Additional Signs and Concerns (cont.)

- Recent losses (break-ups, separations, divorces, deaths)
- Taking excessive risks, recklessness; increased substances
- Feelings of loneliness, rejection, shame, guilt
- In real or serious trouble, especially for the first time
- Problems staying focused or paying attention
- Emotional stress and difficulties → physical complaints

Remember: This is not an all-inclusive list of signs of concern. Anytime you notice behaviors that concern you, don’t hesitate or be afraid to ask questions.
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SUICIDE AND TODAY’S TEENS

Six Questions
(You decide which ones you'd prefer to ask.)

1. Are you feeling depressed?
2. Could you speak to me concerning your feelings about suicide?
3. Are you thinking of committing suicide?

--- If You Don't Like the First Three, Consider the Alternatives---
4. Why did he do it?
5. Why didn't he say something?
6. Why didn't I say something?

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WHAT CAN BE CONSIDERED NORMAL ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR?
WHAT CAN BE CONSIDERED NORMAL ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR?

There are a few things, in the society we live in, that we can say are normal and universal about teens:

• They tend to go through stages: they change like the tides, they ebb and flow.

• They want to be alike but at the same time they want to be different.

• They want to be similar enough to be recognized as part of the group but different enough to make an individual statement about whatever they are making their point about.
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WHAT CAN BE CONSIDERED NORMAL ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR?

Changes in Mood

ZITS

Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

BLEAH! THIS TOWEL IS STILL WET FROM YESTERDAY!

WHO LEFT THIS SODA CAN ON MY NOTEBOOK??

NOW I HAVE TO PRINT THIS STUPID REPORT OUT AGAIN!

BUT THE PRINTER IS OUT OF INK!

GAAA! WHY Didn't SOMEBODY RE-REMIND ME ABOUT THIS??

SHOULD WE SAY ANYTHING? NAW, HE'S JUST IN ONE OF HIS MOODS.

OH? AND WHAT MOOD IS THAT??

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WHAT CAN BE CONSIDERED NORMAL ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR?

Emotional ups and downs

• Emotional ups and downs; intervals of moodiness.

• The teen years are filled with uncertainty and magnified emotional responses.

• Social inconsistency: Your child may complain of having no friends one week, and then go out on the weekend with friends and be fine for a couple of weeks.
WHAT CAN BE CONSIDERED NORMAL ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR?

Some withdrawal from family life

• Typical teen behavior includes a focus on one’s friends and a desire to be independent of the family, to be one’s “own person.”

• Decreased communication; Your teen will not talk to you as often as he or she used to, and he or she may pull away, or not want to be seen in public with you.

• Teens seem to have different opinions than their parents and their friends have a more important role in the decisions they make.
WHAT CAN BE CONSIDERED NORMAL ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR?

Changes in Appearance

• The teenage years are marked by trying on independence through experimentation.

• Styles come and go, and keeping up with trends is important for teenagers. Dyed hair and a body piercing or two is stylish.
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WHAT CAN BE CONSIDERED NORMAL ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR?

Separation/Individuation

• A normal part of adolescence is what is called Separation and Individuation.

• In that normal process, many teens act as if they are rejecting their parents in order to feel more comfortable finding their own identity.

• The temptation for some parents is to return the rejection out of their hurt – but this is a big mistake!
  ❖ What teens feel internally is a roller-coaster of emotion.
  ❖ What they need is a stable place to come back to for support.
WHAT CAN BE CONSIDERED NORMAL ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR?

Assertion of Opinion—Increased arguments

• Your teen will assert their opinion more. There may be arguments and defiance.

• However, with typical teen behavior, these arguments are not constant, nor do they become violent or result in long-standing sullenness or resentment.

• Typical teen behavior may include accusations that you do not love him or her, that you are unfair, that all his or her friends get to do something, or that he or she hates you.

• They may also try to test limits
WHAT CAN BE CONSIDERED NORMAL ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR?

Assertion of Opinion—Increased arguments

ZITS

Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

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WHAT CAN BE CONSIDERED NORMAL ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR?

Changes in Communication – On-Line Socialization

• Limited Face-to-Face Communication (Devices Rule)
• Teens today are now choosing the least interactive ways to communicate
  • Text over phone
  • online instead of in person
  • Monosyllabic
  • Require 20 Questions
WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST NEEDS OUR KIDS HAVE EMOTIONALLY?
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WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST NEEDS STUDENTS HAVE EMOTIONALLY?

1. To be Found Worthy

2. To be Accepted and Belong

3. To be Loved

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WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST NEEDS STUDENTS HAVE EMOTIONALLY?

To have their Identity Firmly Established in God’s Truth

1. As a Christian, the Word should define our normal.

2. Comparing our lives to others breeds discontentment and condemnation in our thinking.

3. If I keep my eyes on what He says I am and what He has called me to, my normal won't look like everyone else's as far as my calling but it will produce the "normal" fruit of the spirit.
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WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST NEEDS STUDENTS HAVE EMOTIONALLY?

WHAT MATTERS IS HOW YOU SEE YOURSELF
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WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST NEEDS STUDENTS HAVE EMOTIONALLY?

To have their Identity Firmly Established in God’s Truth (cont.)

4. They need to know **how to fight against the real enemy**.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

*Ephesians 6:12*

“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.”

*Ephesians 6:11*
WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST NEEDS STUDENTS HAVE EMOTIONALLY?

To have their Identity Firmly Established in God’s Truth (cont.)

5. They need to know the limits God places on the enemy’s influence in and on our lives (think of job!)
   • Your child’s identity is that of a child of God
   • Christ’s death on the cross established your child’s worth
   • No person, achievement, or even trial dictates our destiny – if your child knows Christ as his/her personal Savior, their destiny is secure
   • Nothing separates us from God’s love
WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST NEEDS STUDENTS HAVE EMOTIONALLY?

To have their Identity Firmly Established in God’s Truth (cont.)

6. They need to know how to combat the enemy’s lies with God’s truth—we cannot serve two kingdoms at once.

“The enemy will say we are a failure, but God says that He who began a good work in us will see it through to completion.”

*Philemon 1:6*

“The enemy will taunt us with our weaknesses but God says that when we are weak that HE is strong.”

*2 Corinthians 12:9*
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WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?
✓ If symptoms have lasted longer than 2 weeks, see a mental health professional for evaluation

✓ If your child asks for help...get it! Not doing so sends the message there is something to be ashamed of, and may result in years of damage to be undone in adulthood.

✓ Help firmly ground your children’s identity in Christ as a safeguard against mental health issues!
Often our kids feel unworthy, like they don’t measure up. They wonder if/where they fit in.

They need to know we ALL feel like that on some days. Those are lies of the enemy who seeks to demean and devalue them.

As parents, your primary role is to teach them and model for them their identity in Christ. That is their biggest safeguard against mental health issues.
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WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO SAFEGUARD AGAINST MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES?

• They not only fit in, they are accepted in the beloved (Eph 1:6).

• God has already promised that they are not only a citizen of heaven (Eph 2:6, 19, Phil 3:20, and Col 1:12),

• but also a joint heir with Christ (Rom 8:17, Gal 4:6-7).

• God’s truth says that they are a loved child of God (John 1:12, Rom 8:14-15, 16-17, Gal 3:26, 28; 4:6-7, 1 Thess 5:5).
WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO SAFEGUARD AGAINST MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES?

• They are a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17, Gal 2:20, 1 Peter 1:3, 23).

• They are a friend of Jesus (John 15:15).

• Jesus makes them worthy (2 Thess 1:11-12).
Teach your children the truth about what God says about them:

1. They are a **child of God** and **highly valued** (John 1:12)
2. They are **beautiful** (Psalm 45:11)
3. They are an **overcomer** (Romans 8:37)
4. They are a **masterpiece** and they are **destined for greatness** (Ephesians 2:10)
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WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO SAFEGUARD AGAINST DEPRESSION?

Teach your children the truth about what God says about them:

5. They are **forever loved** (Jeremiah 31:3)
6. They are **wonderful** (Psalm 139:14)
7. They are **worth it** (John 3:16)

If you don’t, you can’t be sure that anyone else will!
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God is my standard for normal

WHAT'S YOURS?
THE JOURNEY TO NORMAL

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO WHEN CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR YOUTH?

✓ Be willing to seek help from a mental health professional
✓ Always convey that there is HOPE.
✓ Because of Him, #HopePrevails
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RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION
For more hope, stay connected with Dr. Bengtson at:
Website: http://www.DrMichelleBengtson.com
Blog: http://drmichellebengtson.com/category/blog/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/DrMichelleBengtson
Twitter: http://www.Twitter.com/DrMBengtson (@DrMBengtson)
LinkedIn: http://www.LinkedIn.com/in/DrMichelleBengtson
Google+: http://www.google.com/+MichelleBengtson
Instagram: http://www.instagram.com/drmichelleb
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCn92DHzGSZk8psDb2FKazOQ
THE JOURNEY TO NORMAL ~ RESOURCES

http://newlife.com for help finding a qualified Christian counselor

https://www.hopefortheheart.org for counseling or biblical resources

http://apa.org American Psychological Association

https://www.aap.org American Academy of Pediatrics

www.nami.org National Alliance on Mental Illness

www.nimh.nih.gov National Institute of Mental Health

www.nmha.org Mental Health America

**SUICIDE HOTLINE:** 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or 1-800-SUICIDE
DR. BENGTSON’S POPULAR BLOG POSTS

How to Help a Depressed Loved One
http://drmichellebengtson.com/how-to-help-a-depressed-loved-one/

10 Things to Know if You Have a Depressed Loved One
http://drmichellebengtson.com/10-things-to-know-if-you-have-a-depressed-loved-one/

What to Say When a Loved One is Depressed
http://drmichellebengtson.com/what-to-say-when-a-loved-one-is-depressed/

What Not to Say When a Loved One is Depressed
http://drmichellebengtson.com/what-not-to-say-when-a-loved-one-is-depressed/
I Don’t Want to Label My Child
http://drmichellebengtson.com/no-labeling-my-child/

How Social Media Skews Our View
http://drmichellebengtson.com/social-media-skews-our-view/

How to Help a Picky Eater
http://drmichellebengtson.com/how-to-help-a-picky-eater/

Feelings Aren’t Inappropriate But the Behavior Is
http://drmichellebengtson.com/ask-dr-b-feelings-arent-inappropriate-but-the-behavior-is/
DR. BENGTSON’S POPULAR BLOG POSTS

Does My Child Have Attention Problems?
http://drmichellebengtson.com/does-my-child-have-attention-problems/

 Trouble Communicating with my Child on the Autism Spectrum

Your Rx: The Answer for Anxiety
http://drmichellebengtson.com/your-rx-the-answer-for-anxiety/

Should I Limit My Child’s Screen Time?
http://drmichellebengtson.com/screen-time-for-kids/
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QUESTIONS