

“Loving Someone With a Mental Illness or History of Trauma”; and “I’m Not Alone: A Teen’s Guide to Living With a Parent Who Has a Mental Illness or History of Trauma”

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Book Title: Loving Someone With a Mental Illness or History of Trauma; I’m Not Alone: A Teen’s Guide to Living With a Parent Who Has a Mental Illness or History of Trauma

Authors: Michelle D. Sherman, DeAnne M. Sherman

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Mental illness and trauma affect not only the individuals who experience them, but also the people who love and care for them. These psychological and social conditions ripple through families and communities, often creating emotional challenges for caregivers and children. In these compassionate and practical books, Michelle D. Sherman and DeAnne M. Sherman provide structured, interactive, and psychologically informed tools for navigating the interpersonal impact of mental illness.

Michelle Sherman, a board-certified clinical psychologist with decades of experience in trauma and military family mental health, along with her daughter, DeAnne Sherman, an educator and peer support advocate, combine their clinical and pedagogical strengths to create two developmentally targeted resources. Their collaboration enriches both books with clinical insight, accessible prose, and a heartfelt understanding of the burdens carried by family members.

Loving Someone With a Mental Illness or History of Trauma centers on the experiences of adult caregivers who support loved ones with select psychiatric diagnoses, including depression, bipolar disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, and anxiety. The book is organized into four main sections. The first part encourages readers to reflect on their emotional journey through self-assessments and guided questions. The second part offers guidance on empowering loved ones while navigating complex health care systems. The third part emphasizes strengthening relationships through effective communication and establishing clear boundaries. The final section addresses common challenges that caregivers face, such as fatigue, crisis episodes, and ongoing emotional strain.

The book is both expository and interactive, blending psychoeducation with exercises that foster insight and resilience. Its tone is warm yet realistic, promoting the idea that caregivers also need to take care of themselves. Sherman and Sherman emphasize that mental illness impacts entire family systems, not just the diagnosed individual, and that sustainable caregiving requires emotional self-awareness and support.

I’m Not Alone, by contrast, targets adolescents living with a parent who has a mental illness or a history of trauma. Using a similar structure, it guides readers through key concepts of mental illness, relational dynamics, coping strategies, and self-care. Each chapter features relatable vignettes, reflection prompts, and journal exercises. Topics include addiction, emotional volatility, stigma, crisis management, and tools on how to ask for help.

What sets *I’m Not Alone* apart from other adolescent-focused mental health books is its gentle, validating tone. The Shermans treat teens not as passive bystanders but as active participants in their family narratives. The book acknowledges the difficult emotions

teens may feel, such as confusion, fear, anger, and guilt. It offers language and tools to help them process these emotions while setting boundaries and seeking support. The inclusion of real-life examples makes the material especially accessible.

Both books are based on principles of cognitive behavioral therapy, trauma-informed care, and family systems theory. They align well with recovery-oriented frameworks that emphasize relational healing, resilience, and empowerment. The Shermans also offer practical tools such as checklists, crisis planning templates, and resource lists that make the books applicable in clinical, educational, and home settings.

From a broader scholarly perspective, *Loving Someone* serves as a valuable bridge between technical guides, such as Miklowitz's *The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide*¹ and more personal narratives like Woolis' *When Someone You Love Has a Mental Illness*.² It balances clinical insight with emotional support and accessibility. Similarly, *I'm Not Alone* complements Beardslee's work on resilience in children of depressed parents³ while expanding on diagnoses and being notably more interactive.

One of the greatest strengths of both books is their focus on the experiences of family members who are often marginalized in mental health discourse. *Loving Someone* explicitly addresses caregiver grief, burnout, and the complexities of loving someone who may experience significant changes over time. The book's tone is nonjudgmental and supportive, allowing caregivers to feel seen and affirmed. *I'm Not Alone* similarly excels in providing emotional validation, encouraging teens to name their truths without shame.

The books, however, have areas that could be strengthened. While *Loving Someone* does an excellent job of addressing mood and trauma-related conditions, it only briefly acknowledges disorders like borderline personality disorder and substance use disorder, which often pose distinct relational challenges. Expanding this content or providing companion materials on these topics would enhance the book's comprehensiveness. Likewise, while *I'm Not Alone* includes a range of family scenarios, it does not fully engage with more marginalized youth experiences such as bereavement, neglect, racial trauma, or LGBTQ+ identity-based stress. Adding depth in these areas would increase its reach.

Both texts could benefit from a more thorough discussion of cultural competence and systemic inequities. While they acknowledge family diversity, neither book comprehensively examines how mental health experiences are influenced by social determinants such as poverty, racism, immigration status, or generational trauma. These are notable omissions, especially for professionals working in multicultural communities.

Despite these limitations, the books remain exemplary for their intended audiences. They are ideal for integration into wellness programming, therapy sessions, school counseling, and caregiver support groups. Clinicians in family medicine, pediatrics, psychology, and social work can confidently recommend them as psychoeducational tools. Their strengths-based framing and user-friendly design make them accessible to a wide range of readers.

In practice, *Loving Someone* can serve as a workbook and reference guide for family members seeking to cultivate sustainable, loving relationships amid ongoing mental health challenges. *I'm Not Alone* can serve as both a therapeutic adjunct and a stand-alone source of comfort and clarity for adolescents. The inclusion of notes for parents, resource lists, and group therapy suggestions enhances the functionality of both texts.

Michelle and DeAnne Sherman have created two essential guides that reflect not only clinical excellence but also moral imagination. *Loving Someone With a Mental Illness or History of Trauma* invites caregivers into a more compassionate and empowering relationship with themselves and their loved ones. *I'm Not Alone* extends the same compassion and education to teens, equipping them with the language, tools, and hope they need. Together, these books remind us that mental illness, while immensely challenging, does not diminish empathy, resilience, or human connection.

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