

1 in 5 teenagers and young adults suffer from mental illness—digital books offer support

Cameron's Collection helps teens in Charlottesville High School understand and manage depression, stress, anxiety and more

Across the US, the number of teen suicides has risen dramatically over the years. Whether it's the stress of high-level courses or the anxiety of divorcing parents, a staggering amount of students are overcrowding school counseling centers, says *Psychology Today*. In fact, the National Alliance on Mental Illness reports that 1 in 5 teenagers and young adults suffer from mental illness.

"It might even be higher here," says Anne Ernst, library media specialist at Charlottesville High School in central Virginia. "There are a lot of kids living in poverty or dealing with family issues. There's also lot of pressure and stress to succeed, to take AP classes to get into top-tier colleges."

To help navigate these and other mental health issues, Charlottesville students now have access to Cameron's Collection, a series of e-books that offer resources and strategies to help teens or loved ones. So far, members of the school's international community and students who have experienced trauma as refugees are frequent users. Students can privately access and search for specific terms within the books through smartphones or computers.

"I have a lot of students who quietly ask me for a book about depression or something, and I show them how to use these," Ernst says. "It is a great relief because privacy is so important. A kid who's exploring their mental health, dealing with cyberbullying or researching depression doesn't necessarily want to walk around with a book."

Namesake dreamed about awareness

The collection is named in honor of Cameron Gallagher. She was a bright, talented young girl battling depression and anxiety whose dream was to raise awareness and to help erase the stigma about the topic. At the age of 16, she suddenly passed away from an undiagnosed heart condition. Her legacy and efforts live on through the Cameron K. Gallagher (CKG) Foundation (ckgfoundation.org).

In collaboration with the CKG Foundation, Gale, a Cengage company, curated nearly 40 titles. They cover issues such as anxiety, eating disorders and bullying, of which Cameron's mother, Grace, executive director for CKG, says can sometimes be the byproduct of not taking care of your mental health. "I'm glad this collection can speak to so many and offer tools for those who need it," she says.



Resources meet diverse needs

Articles can be saved or shared, and the books can be translated—which is particularly relevant in this 1,200-student school where 34 languages are spoken. Each book contains additional resources, including information on getting professional help.

The collection came to Charlottesville in December 2017 and usage picked up in January.

"I suspect that is mostly due to research projects," Ernst adds, explaining she deliberately didn't announce the new collection with fanfare. "We wanted a quiet rollout, so students could become familiar with the resources."

Already, **10** students have sought guidance from an e-book on **anxiety disorder** with additional use by school counselors. Another item on **teen self-injury** has been accessed **16 times** since January. In addition, counselors have leveraged **411 Parents Divorcing**.

Ernst anticipates expanded use of Cameron's Collection as word spreads.

"Gale has been wonderful, and I've been really pleased to have been able to add this into our collection," Ernst says. "It was very timely for us. I think over time it will grow to be one of our most important resources for our students."



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