

Girl stuff: the real deal

Girl stuff. Your full-on guide to the teen years. Kaz Cooke. Melbourne: Penguin, 2007 (554 pp, \$39.95). ISBN 978 0 670 02887 0.



KAZ COOKE SEEMS to have explored every nook and cranny in a teenage girl's mind in this colourful, accessible tome. Divided into four parts: body, head, heart and "info to go," she covers a vast range of issues from puberty, friends, and stress, to money matters and job hunting.

Girl stuff understands where adolescents are coming from — useful for those of us working with them! The minutiae of pubertal development

(vaginal secretions, nipple colour, tampon traumas ...) may never come to our attention in the consulting room, but can cause hours of angst for many a young woman. How to negotiate relationships is more important to the sexually experimenting adolescent than the risk of invisible sexually transmissible infections.

Cooke learned about the concerns of teenage girls via a web-based survey that received over 4000 responses, and hundreds of these quotes appear throughout. The more medical issues (puberty, acne, eating disorders, and depression, just to name a few) have been well researched, and there is an impressive list of adolescent health experts among the acknowledgements. The book is heavily sprinkled with Kaz Cooke's delightful humour as well as her great cartoon illustrations.

I would have liked more integration of cross-cultural issues. In the otherwise excellent chapter on families, there is no mention of the cultural differences that shape families. An overt statement about how beliefs about sex and gender may be culturally determined and that not everyone will be part of the dominant culture would be preferable to the passing reference to how religion and culture influence people's beliefs about sex.

Adolescent substages progress rapidly, and by the time most adolescent girls are faced with sexual decision making, they may have worked out puberty. Conversely, the chapters on sex and drugs may not seem appropriate for a very young adolescent preoccupied with buying her first bra. It has been handy having three adolescent girls at home, one in each substage, to test this out. The book is so full of common sense and practical information including statements such as "don't read this chapter if you're not ready", that I had no qualms myself. I wish it had been around when I was a teenager.

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