

SEEN

HEALING DESPAIR AND ANXIETY
IN KIDS AND TEENS THROUGH THE
POWER OF CONNECTION



FREE SAMPLE

BY WILL HUTCHERSON
& CHINWÉ WILLIAMS, PH.D.

We hope you enjoy this complimentary copy of
*Seen: Healing Despair and Anxiety in Kids and Teens
Through the Power of Connection* for
leaders, volunteers, and parents.

This sample includes the introduction, the first
chapter, and other details about the book.

Available at OrangeStore.org and ParentCueStore.org.

To find out more about *Seen*, and to discover other
books like it, visit OrangeBooks.com.

WHAT PEOPLE
ARE SAYING ABOUT
SEEN

"At a time when teen suicidality, self-harm, depression, and anxiety are higher than ever, *Seen* is just the right gift at just the right time for just the right people. Using a gentle and compassionate voice, Will and Dr. Chinwé integrate science and faith in remarkable ways that will help you see, hear, and connect with young people in your life. Immerse yourself in the depth and simplicity of this book, and you can become even better at giving youth the love and grace they so desperately need."

—JOHN SOMMERS-FLANAGAN,
Ph.D. Professor of Counseling, University of Montana and
author of *Clinical Interviewing and Suicide Assessment and
Treatment Planning: A Strengths-Based Approach*

"It's hard to think of a more important topic than this. If you need a lifeline for a kid who got swept up in the hopelessness of 2020, pick up *Seen*."

—JON ACUFF,
New York Times bestselling author of
Soundtracks: The Surprising Solution to Overthinking

"I cannot wait for *SEEN* to get in the hands of parents, small group leaders, and anyone who works with the next generation. Thank you, Dr. Chinwé and Will for creating a mental health resource that is founded in both faith and psychology!"

—SAM COLLIER,
bestselling author of *A Greater Story*,
and Lead Pastor of Hillsong Atlanta

“Seen is the intervention that we all need! This text clearly articulates the connection between the brain, body, and despair with references to research on trauma processing, neuroscience, attachment, and child development. It also provides much needed case examples and practical techniques that anyone can use with children and adolescents who are in despair. If you’re a parent, mental health professional, educator, or simply part of a child’s village, you should be reading *Seen* right now!”

—LAYLA J. BONNER, PH.D.,
Assistant Professor of Counseling, Belmont University,
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

“*Seen* is a book for all of us. From parents to pastors, this book challenges us with hope, courage and commitment. Will Hutcherson and Dr. Chinwé tell inspiring stories and give practical advice on how to best add value to this struggling generation. Don’t miss this exciting and riveting book that will stir your soul to action.”

—KEVIN MONAHAN,
Next Gen Professor, Liberty University Online, and
Executive Pastor of Journey Church, Lakeworth, Fla.

“These words from Chinwé and Will are going to be balm to your anxious heart. With the rising trend of anxiety and depression in kids these days, the practical steps they give to help kids heal, along with the clinical data they cover, is exactly what we need in these times.”

—CARLOS WHITTAKER,
bestselling author of *Kill the Spider:*
Getting Rid of What’s Really Holding You Back

“I am thrilled how Will and Chinwé have clarified what is happening with this generation and despair. After reading *Seen* you’ll be enlightened and know there is a reason to have hope!”

—KEVIN W. NORWOOD,
DMin, MaPT, Student Pastor, Owasso First Assembly

"What a timely book executed brilliantly by Chinwé and Will. You can feel the passion they have to help our children cope, deal, and heal. We need this now more than ever. A tool box, a guide, a true gift."

—SHANOLA HAMPTON,
wife, mom, pastor's daughter, director, producer,
award-winning actor best known for her role
as Veronica on Showtime's *Shameless*

"With increasing numbers of kids saying they're anxious (and increasing reasons for them to be so), parents and leaders have to go beyond the easy answers and seek to understand what their kids are feeling. This book by my friends Will Hutcherson and Chinwé Williams offers real and practical steps for parents who just aren't sure what to do next. Will approaches this from a ministry leader's perspective. Chinwé brings her experience as a licensed counselor to the conversation. With solid research, authentic examples and deep empathy, they help us all see what's right in front of us."

—REGGIE JOINER,
Founder and CEO of Orange, speaker,
and author of multiple books, including
Don't Miss It and his latest, *It's Personal*

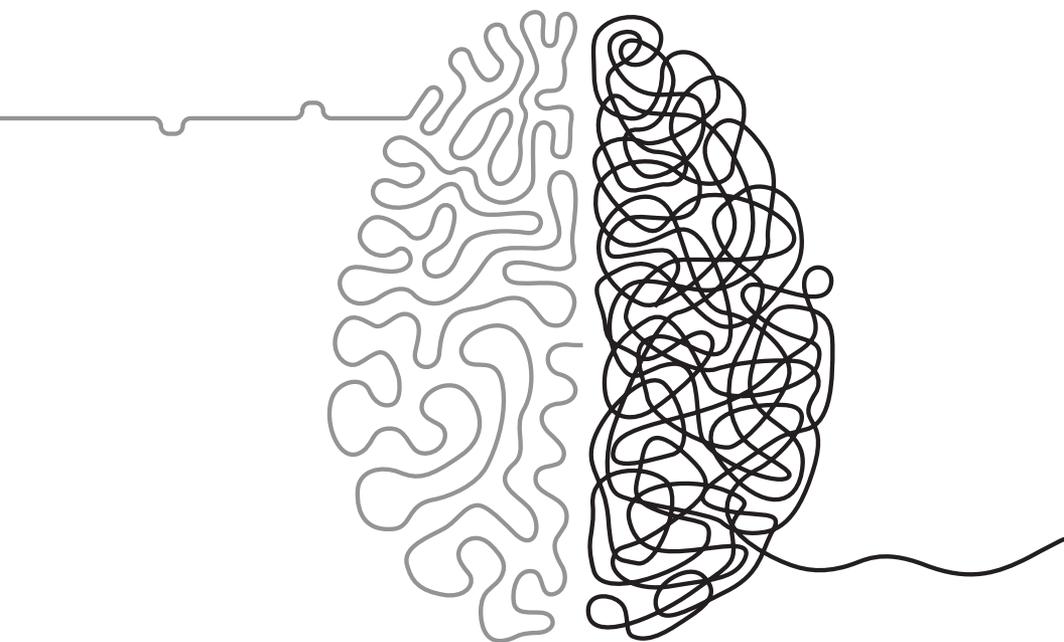
"The mental health crisis facing today's children and youth is undoubtedly one of the greatest concerns for anyone working to help young people reach their full potential. As parents, educators, and community leaders, we must listen deeply to those who can provide real insight and practical assistance to help a generation move forward. As a mother, I'm grateful for Will and Chinwé's insight, scientific research, clinical observation, and ability to guide each of us to know both when and how to act."

—KRISTEN IVY
President of Orange and Parent Cue,
architect of "It's Just a Phase," educator,
and author of more than 30 books



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BY WILL HUTCHERSON &
CHINWÉ WILLIAMS, PH.D.

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To the Hutch crew, Arianne—You are an example of deep connection and helping others feel seen, as I have received the benefits of your love and empathy.

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To my family, friends, and mentors—Thank you.

—WILL HUTCHERSON

To the Williams tribe Lonnie, Bray, Noah, and Jailyn—
I'm grateful for your love and endless support.

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To Chima—I stand in awe of the gifts God has placed within you, thanks for sharing them.

To Tonya, Andrea, and Layla—Thank you for your faithful intercession. I'm forever grateful for your wisdom and encouragement. Because of all of you, I feel seen.

—CHINWÉ WILLIAMS

We both want to thank The Orange Team for making this book a reality. Karen Wilson, Mike Jeffries, Brian Sharp, and so many more—Thank you for your hard work and for loving kids, teens, small group leaders, churches, schools, and parents through projects like these.

Lastly, to those walking through "the dark night of the soul"—

There is always hope.

Just keep breathing and keep connecting.

PREFACE

What We Need You to Know Before Reading This Book

In recent years, our world has seen a pandemic of depression, anxiety, and despair in kids and teenagers. In fact, the age group that has seen the highest increase in suicide rates is in kids age 10 to 14 years old.¹

This book was written during a global health pandemic, which has presented even more challenges to the mental health of kids and teenagers. Adding to the crisis, centuries of racial injustice have come rushing to the center of our attention. Anger, fear, and hurt are boiling over in every community from the weight many feel over continued social injustice and racism.

The combination of social unrest, uncertainty, and isolation has resulted in traumatic reactions for many families. It will take years to fully know how the extraordinary circumstances in this new decade have impacted our society, especially its youngest members. Unfortunately, what we do know with certainty is that many people have experienced an increase in anxiety, distress, and a sense of helplessness, but likely it has increased even more so for kids and teens across the world.²

But this book isn't about the bad news.

This book is about *hope*.

This book is about practical solutions for parents, small group leaders, pastors, and caring adults to help heal despair in kids and teens.

There Is Always Hope

Hope is the mantra our team has been sharing with teenagers in schools across the country. After working in youth ministry for over 15 years and encountering an increasing number of kids wrestling with depression and suicide, I (Will) set out on a mission to help fight this raging battle threatening a generation of youth.

Because of my studies in psychology, I had a hunch that healing despair starts in the brain. I suspected that the primary tools for healing likely included empathy and love and that human connection could help heal the brain in despair.

With the help of my friend Greg Hasek, a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, I started diving into the research. It turns out that I was onto something, and what we found was fascinating. People who are in despair experience a physical *dis-pairing* in the brain, which causes a person to become emotionally detached.

The good news I was looking for is that study after study from different disciplines of human sciences confirm that a relational connection can help the brain repair itself. Our brains are wired to heal, but it takes intentional steps in love and empathy—steps that I have found don't always come easy to us adults. Some of them are completely opposite of what we find in traditional parenting playbooks.

In 2018, I gathered a group of communicators, counselors, and educators to start a non-profit, Curate Hope. The goal was simple—to use our cumulative experience to partner

with parents, churches, and schools to help heal despair in kids and teenagers.

Our team began traveling the country, encouraging hurting teens that there is always hope, even in the darkness of despair. While we helped many kids and teens flip the script to their story, we encountered many more parents, educators, and pastors who were looking for ways to help as well. Families and schools were looking to counselors and mental health professionals, only to find long waitlists or affordability challenges. I knew the best way to help kids was to empower those closest to them with the same healing tools we were learning to use. My journey to help leaders and parents walk with kids through dark times eventually led me to Dr. Chinwé Williams.

I (Chinwé) have been counseling children and teenagers and the adults who love them for close to twenty years. I started my counseling career as a high school counselor right out of graduate school. I was pretty young and relatively green when I began—and felt frequently caught off-guard by the myriad of challenges many of my students faced. Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, self-harming, and multiple forms of trauma—You name it, my students experienced it.

My students challenged me in the best possible way, and I remain grateful to God for those years, which have greatly informed my style and approach as a therapist today. What I've learned in my study of attachment theory and experienced in my clinical work with kids, is that connection is key. I'll never forget what a mentor once told me, "Kids don't care what you know until they know that you care."

Know This

If you picked up this book, maybe there is a person you deeply care about who is battling with depression, anxiety,

or hopelessness. Perhaps you don't know what to do, or you're struggling to connect.

First, know that you are not alone. Parenting or leading a kid or teen struggling with despair is particularly difficult, and it can render one helpless. But remember, as Will mentioned in the very beginning, there is always hope, and there is plenty you can do right now without the benefit of a psychology degree.

Together, we will break down practical tools that will help the kids and teens you love battle despair. All of these tools are based on the latest in brain research and the science of attachment. Also, it's important to note that we wrote this book from a Christian viewpoint. Faith is an important part of our lives and we believe God helps us in our time of need. If you picked up this book but don't consider yourself a Christian or person of faith, we still believe you will be able to utilize the tools we will present.

So, with research in hand, we have set out to empower parents and caring adults. To give practical and easy to understand tools so parents don't feel helpless, stuck, or powerless against the invisible enemy of despair. To give you hope!

Before we go any further, let us first say this: There's no way a book this size can be an exhaustive dissertation on the mental health crisis in kids and teens. We hope this book will be a great **starting point** for parents and caring adults who want to understand what kids are facing and learn practical tools to help.

It's also important to understand that in this book, we have to make some generalizations. There are certain practices that can help contribute to mental health. However, this **does not mean** that if a child or teen is struggling with despair, depression, or thoughts of suicide, their parents and other caring adults in their lives aren't doing enough

or didn't do enough. There are times when an individual that has been loved and cared for incredibly well struggles with depression or dies by suicide, and it simply doesn't make any sense.

If you're reading this, and you've lost a child to suicide, we are so incredibly sorry for your loss. We can't imagine the amount of pain you've endured and continue to endure every single day. We can only imagine the questions you've wrestled with—questions for which you may never have an answer. Please know that you also are not responsible for what happened. The human brain is very complex. And there are things we may never understand this side of heaven.

Our prayer is that these pages will not make you feel like you didn't do enough. Instead, we pray that the message we share will honor you and maybe even give you the smallest glimmer of hope. And though you've suffered indescribable loss, you too can be part of this change. You have something incredible to offer with your story. Something so precious and so deeply personal that though it may take all of the courage you can muster, opening your heart can help bring healing.

To every parent, small group leader, coach, pastor, and caring adult, please know that no matter how many times you feel you've messed up, you can *still* make a difference in the kids in your life. You don't have to execute these tools perfectly in order for them to work. Each intentional decision you make *matters*, including the decision to pick up this book.

This book *does* not and *could* not possibly address every situation or emotional health challenge that you will face as a caring adult. But we will provide you with helpful information that will enable you to better understand your kid and teen while recognizing just how important you are in his or her life.

One last note: Throughout this book we will tell stories from our experience counseling, guiding, and mentoring kids and teens. Names of individuals and identifying details or facts have been changed for confidentiality. Therefore, any identifying resemblance to actual individuals is merely coincidental.

Thank you for allowing us the privilege of adding to the conversation.

Will Hutcherson and Chinwé Williams, Ph.D.

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ONE

OLD TOOLS

Tyler was one of my (Will's) favorite students. I know neither parents nor youth pastors are supposed to have favorites, but I loved spending time with Tyler. He was a great kid—funny, respectful, and smart.

As a seventeen-year-old, Tyler had a bright future. He was one of our top students in the leadership development program I was helping run at the time. He was committed and hard working. I would often see him pitching in to help others and was eager to offer a hand.

Though Tyler seemed to have it together on the outside, he was actually suffering from depression. He shared with me the struggle he had to get out of bed some mornings. Despite loving the program and the other students, Tyler had moments of self-doubt. In his worst moments, he even had thoughts of ending his life.

How does a kid who seemingly has it all together get so down? I mean, he has so much going for him, right? He comes from a good family. *Check.* He wasn't bullied as a kid. *Check.*

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He didn't have any significant trauma from abuse. *Check.*

So, what was happening?

This scenario was becoming all-too-familiar. More and more teens like Tyler started popping up, and I knew there seemed to be more than a few instances of despair and depression. Students started coming into my office looking for guidance as they shared, "I think I have depression." Over and over again, I had parents or students approach me about the concerns they had for others.

"They just don't seem like themselves anymore."

"They're always down."

"She is saying some things that are really concerning me."

It seemed more and more students were feeling paralyzed and anxious when facing resistance or obstacles in life. Students were losing their resilience and their motivation. They seemed to have a pessimistic outlook about the future and were disengaging emotionally. I wanted to know more about what was causing this increasing disengagement or detachment in recent years, so I started asking questions and listening.

What I found didn't just concern me, but rather it *alarmed* me. Teenagers were facing high levels of despair. Some were self-diagnosing as being very depressed. Others were sharing about panic attacks or anxiety. At worst, they described their attempts to kill themselves or their future plan to kill themselves. Surprisingly it turns out, it isn't just my own community experiencing these trends. Despair has become a serious problem nationwide.

Here are some pretty startling statistics:

- Since 2007 . . .
 - ▶ Suicide rates have increased by 76 percent for ages 15 to 19.
 - ▶ Suicide rates have nearly doubled in teen girls.

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- ▶ The highest rate of increase in suicide among all age groups is in kids between 10 and 14 years old.
- ▶ Depressive symptoms are up 21 percent in boys, and up 50 percent in girls.³
- Suicide attempts among black teens increased by 73 percent between 1991 and 2017, and there is elevated risk of suicide among African American boys ages 5 to 11.⁴
- In early 2020, an estimated 1 out of 4 young adults contemplated suicide.⁵
- In March 2020, the *Disaster Distress Helpline* saw an increase of 891 percent in call volume.⁶

Many feel powerless against the depression and despair kids are facing today. All of us are scared, not wanting the story we've heard so many times to become the story of our own kids. So, we do our best with what we know.

A Time When I Blew It

Remember my favorite student, Tyler? I saw so much potential in Tyler, and I wanted to help him reach it. I thought: *Maybe he just needs a push*. Perhaps Tyler just needed to be challenged and motivated to overcome his despair. If he could only see his true potential, then maybe his dark cloud would lift.

I'm embarrassed to confess these thoughts, but out of my goodwill, I devised a plan to "help" him. I worked with another program leader to map out a personal development plan focused on challenging Tyler and pushing him out of his comfort zone.

Over the following months, we executed our plan, fully expecting we'd have a completely new student in ninety days. Beaming with joy, he would then thank us for pushing him and helping him to see the positive side of life.

That's *not* what happened.

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One weekend at a church retreat, Tyler had a major setback. Being away from family, in a spiritually charged environment he wasn't used to, his anxiety increased. He tried to share his feelings with another leader, but he was dismissed with trite responses like, "Well, man, just trust God and let's keep praying."

Later, on the second night, Tyler couldn't take it any longer. He felt so uncomfortable and alone that he called his parents, who drove two hours to pick him up. He left without telling anyone.

"He can't just leave without saying anything!" one leader blurted out as we all nodded our heads in agreement. With eyebrows lifted, another leader added, "Well, we are going to have a hard talk about this."

The following weeks after the retreat, the "hard talks" designed to help Tyler seemed to do the opposite. Our plan hadn't worked. Instead, Tyler became resistant to personal challenge, was disrespectful, and seemed angry. I didn't know what to do. Why couldn't he just change his attitude? I mean, "His attitude is his altitude!" Right? He just needed to snap out of his funk.

Moment of Truth

The moment of truth came after a few months of working on our plan. Another retreat was coming up, but this time Tyler politely shared with another leader he wouldn't be going. I was furious and asked him to come to my office. But, when he tried to explain to me how he was feeling, I didn't listen. I was too busy thinking about the principle, rule, or statement I was going to say next.

"You know, you committed to going on this trip as part of our group. You need to see it through."

Tyler again tried to share his feelings with me.

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"I understand you feel that way, but it doesn't matter. You need to get over how you're feeling and come with us."

Again, I wasn't listening. Frustrated and misunderstood, Tyler quit the program the next day.

I blew it.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I wasn't able to help Tyler because I was using "old tools." I was trying to fix him, offer simple solutions, toughen him up, and force change. These methods may have worked at one time and may even still work with some, but these tools are duds for most. This experience changed me, and I knew I had to learn a new approach.

It is easy to feel powerless, fearful, and not know what to do. Every parent, small group leader, and youth pastor is asking things like:

What can I do against this invisible enemy?

Am I missing something?

Am I doing the right things?

What are the right things?

The Good News

Here is the good news:

You are not powerless.

The truth is you have a superpower. You really do. I'm not just over-hyping.

Our greatest weapon against despair and suicide is you:

Parents.

Small group leaders.

Youth pastors.

Caring adults.

It turns out, there are tools that can help kids and teenagers heal. Remember when we said our brains are wired for

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healing? They are! Our brains are designed to respond in predictable ways when we connect with others on a deep level and when we “feel seen.” In fact, the research shows that we aren’t powerless at all. For instance, research on the neuroscience of attachment shows us that the brain can learn a new attachment pattern because of the process of neuroplasticity. The brain has the ability to rewire and reorganize itself.

Another helpful discovery is that a secure attachment with an adult can not only help heal and rewire the brain from a past insecure attachment, but it can also help decrease the risk for despair and suicidal thoughts in adolescents.⁷

Whether you are a parent of a preschooler, elementary-aged kid, teenager, or young adult, you can begin habits now that will nurture emotionally healthy development and create resilience against despair when they are older.

If you know ANYONE who is facing any level of despair, there are practical things you can do right now to intervene and begin the process of healing. These are tools that will help you make significant connections that lead to change—tools I wish I had with Tyler.

I did many things wrong in my plan to help Tyler, but the greatest was my inability to see him and what he was feeling. He didn’t feel *seen*. Ironically, if I had just connected and resisted the urge to “fix” him, I could have played a part in helping him to heal. Instead, I unknowingly played a part in keeping him right where he was.

I’m happy to report that Tyler is doing great today. He went to counseling and is managing his depression, and I learned a difficult lesson that shaped the journey I am on today. The true key to Tyler’s success was his parents. They were deeply engaged. They prayed for him every day, and they instinctively used many of the tools we will share in this book.

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These strategies are ground-tested and we believe they will empower you to be a part of the solution to the rising despair we are seeing in kids and teenagers. They will help you connect with, give hope to, and lead the next generation towards healing.

IS YOUR KID OR TEEN FACING ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, OR THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE?

Whether you're a parent, youth leader, teacher, or caring adult, not knowing how to help those dealing with difficult emotions can leave you feeling intimidated, powerless, and discouraged. It can feel scary.

But we want you to know there is hope.

In this book, Will and Dr. Chinwé will help you understand how the brain works when someone is in despair, and why some of the things you'd think would help sometimes end up making matters worse. More importantly, you'll discover simple, yet powerful, tools you can use everyday to connect with a kid or teenager to help them heal.

A beautiful convergence of faith and psychology, SEEN is a quick read that uses both clinical research and real life stories to give you—and the kids you love—hope.



Will Hutcherson is a national speaker, the founder of Curate Hope, and a Next Gen/youth pastor of 15 years. Will is passionate about finding practical ways to bring hope to kids and teens who are facing increasing amounts of anxiety, depression, and despair. He lives in the sunshine state with his wife Arianne and three kids.



Chinwé Williams, Ph.D., is a Board-Certified, Licensed Professional Counselor and the owner of Meaningful Solutions Counseling & Consulting. She is passionate about equipping parents, leaders, and educators in supporting youth who are battling anxiety, depression, despair and trauma. Her favorite roles are being wife and mom to three awesome kids.



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