Teenager Chase Block faced a lot at an early age – his parent’s divorce, his mother’s drug addiction and later, her tragic suicide. Rather than wallow in self-pity, Chase wrote a book about his experiences in hopes of helping other teens. While his book offers practical, mature, no-nonsense advice for young people, it has something for parents, too — a unique window into the mind of today’s teens. For a chance to win a copy of his book Chasing Happiness, please see the end of this post for details.

I was a 13-year-old kid growing up in Jacksonville, Florida, when I decided I wanted to help other kids whose parents were divorcing. My own folks split when I was 6, and then had other relationships, marriages and divorces. I felt I could help my friends learn what to expect when they were facing similar family shifts.

I decided to write a book of practical tips and advice on how to survive divorce – from a kid’s perspective. The day before I actually began working with an editor on the book, my mom killed herself.

My beautiful, wonderful mom, who was dearly loved by everyone, lost her decades-long battle with mental illness, an addiction to pills, and alcoholism. She took her own life eight years after she and my dad split up. I was shocked and confused – but I didn’t want to forget the book. As horrible as I felt, I knew other kids would go through this stuff too, and maybe my story could help them.

It wasn’t easy to talk about everything I was going through. Now that my book, Chasing Happiness: One Boy’s Guide to Helping Other Kids Cope with Divorce, Parental Addictions and Death, is published, I’m hearing from people, like parents and teachers, who are so glad other kids can check it out.

I talk about the shock of my mom’s suicide, my grief and guilt, and my own suicidal thoughts. The biggest thing I learned, both from my parents’ divorce and my mom’s death, is that you can’t do it alone. Family, friends, teachers, therapists, hobbies — all have their place in helping kids work through the tough spots.

By the age of 14, I had gone through challenges that people twice my age couldn’t imagine. Now I want to help kids dealing with their parents’ divorce, drug addiction, suicide, or any personal tragedy. My message isn’t, “Look at how horrible this is,” but, “Here’s what I learned, and how I learned it. I want to share this information with you.”

I also hope to let people know kids today are pretty smart.
We know a lot more than adults give us credit for. We usually already know the stuff you try to hide from us. Just ask us! We really appreciate straight talk, and not just pretending that what’s happening right in front of us isn’t there.

If I could tell other kids one thing it would be that I hope you never have to go through really hard times. But, if you do, please know you’re not alone — you can make it through, and you can make a difference.

As for adults, after you read this, I hope you’ll never ignore our emotions, or think we don’t feel things as deeply as grownups because we’re not acting the way you think an upset or depressed person should. Don’t confuse ‘young’ with ‘clueless.’ We’re more intelligent, worldly, stressed out, and plugged in than you guys were at our age. We need your help, and we also need your respect.