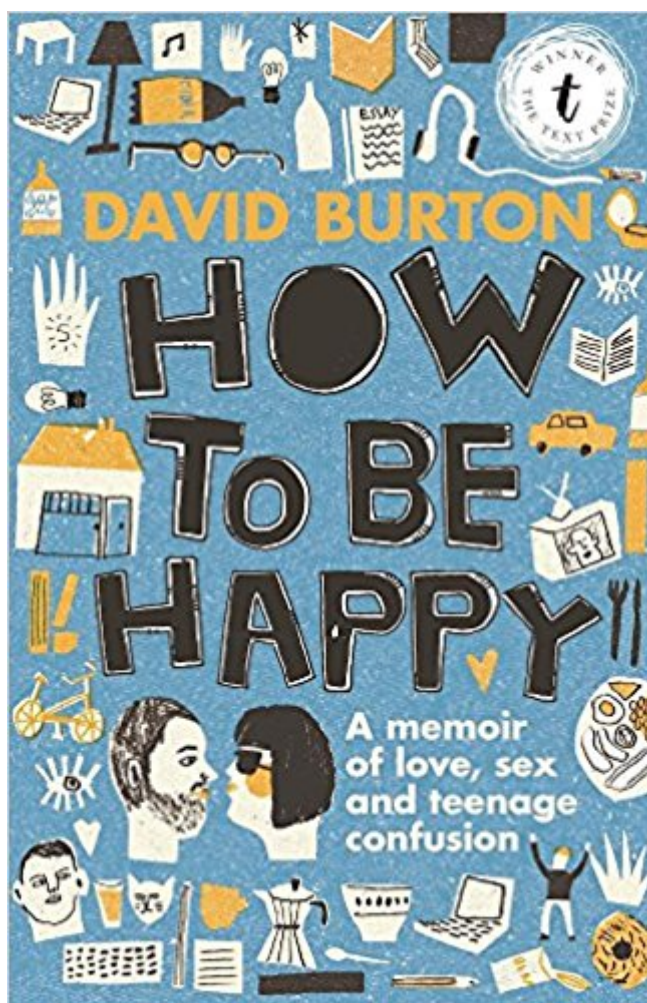


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# How To Be Happy: A Memoir Of Love, Sex And Teenage Confusion



## Synopsis

'Burton's descriptions of his anxiety and depression are tangibly poignant, giving authentic voice to those struggling with similar issues. His tone morphs fluidly from compulsively funny to devastating from one moment to the next, and his uproarious wit shines throughout. A heartfelt, accessible book that strives to break down the stigmas surrounding mental illness with remarkable humor and honesty.'

Winner of the 2014 Text Prize for Young Adult and Children's Writing

Delivers some devastating truth bombs. Sexuality is hard. Identity is hard. Love is hard. School is hard

This book shines a much-needed light back through the tunnel. It is a call-out to teenagers still struggling to find their way.

A funny, sad and serious memoir, this is David Burton's story of his turbulent life at high school and beyond. Feeling out of place and convinced he's not normal, David has a rocky start. He longs to have a girlfriend, but his first date is a disaster. The same debilitating anxiety cripples his encounters with boys. He carefully constructs an outgoing identity; an extroverted, adventurous character, for whom everything is fine. But everything is not fine. At the center of it all, trying desperately to work it all out, is the real David.

How to Be Happy tackles depression, friendship, sexual identity, suicide, academic pressure, love and adolescent confusion. It's a brave and honest account of one young man's search for a happy, true and meaningful life.

David Burton is a writer from Brisbane, now based in Sydney, best known for his theatre work. A speaker and presenter in school across Queensland, David is passionate about finding ways to open dialogue about the challenges faced by teens including sexual identity, depression and family life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'Burton's descriptions of his anxiety and depression are tangibly poignant, giving authentic voice to those struggling with similar issues. His tone morphs fluidly from compulsively funny to devastating from one moment to the next, and his uproarious wit shines throughout. A heartfelt, accessible book that strives to break down the stigmas surrounding mental illness with remarkable humor and honesty. (Memoir. 15-adult) [Kirkus](#)

This was highly entertaining in parts, and endearing for its personal and honest narration. The writer has a rollicking voice, and keeps the mood light, despite the (sometimes) heavy material. However, there was a lot of story crammed into a very small book. The writer seems determined to recount all details of his life up to the present. I wonder whether the content wouldn't have been better divided into two novellas. All in all, a sweet debut.

First of all... as with almost everything I read, I downloaded this as an ebook from the local library. (I also read a lot of Kindle Unlimited books) While I realize that I am not the author's target audience, I had hoped to like this book more and possibly learn some new techniques for being happy. I did find the story interesting... and I thought the author wrote well... and I enjoyed the humorous parts and felt for him during the stressful times. BUT... I wish he would have called the book 'Looking for Happiness' not 'How to be Happy' since I really didn't learn how to be happy. all in all, it was OK. Not wonderful, not awful. but not what I had hoped for.

The title is kind of misleading, but I still find myself absorbed with the book. Short but intense it is. The author had to deal with depression, family issues (parents with possible mental illnesses and siblings with Asperger) and also his sexuality. I find myself in the author's constant questions about his psychological problems and orientation: these are not things that are within our control and can change in a blink of an eye. I am glad he has found happiness. \*I got a free copy in exchange for an honest review from NetGalley

'How to Be Happy: A Memoir of Love, Sex and Teenage Confusion' [Kirkus](#) is Australian author David Burton's debut. I read this book ages ago and then didn't know what to do about how much I loved it. Writing a review was hard, and

the words I tried to put down didn't adequately express how much I loved the book. And then I went to Brisbane Writers Festival, and attended an evening conversation between David and fellow memoirist, Robert Hoge that just blew me away for how candid and funny he was that reiterated for me just how special *How to be Happy* truly is and still, I struggled. So just know that this review will probably end up expressing only a miniscule fraction of my admiration for David and this book of his, which won the 2014 Text Prize for Young Adult and Children's Writing. Sorry I tried, but this really is one of those books and authors that I'm just going to end up telling you to read and attend any of his appearances because there's something special here that you've just got to discover for yourself. Anywho. The book opens thus;\*\*\*I don't know how to be happy. Yeah, sorry. Awkward. Okay, let me rephrase. I don't know how to make you happy. But I have a pretty good idea what would help. Trouble is, my tips sound fairly lame. It's like when you ask someone about the secret to losing weight and then answer "eat well and exercise". True, but profoundly unhelpful.\*\*\*And right there is how I got totally onboard with this brutally honest and funny memoir because David's "endgame" as a memoirist is really to just put the ugly truth down on paper. To put into a book all the things he went through with two brothers with Aspergers, bullied at school, worried about a self-harming friend, his own spirals into depression and anxiety not to mention all the teenager years of sexual confusion and hormonal whirlpools. At one point David remembers his dad giving him a copy of John Marsden's *Secret Men*, a 1998 non-fiction book for teen boys that touched on everything from leadership responsibilities to masturbation (a revelation for young David Burton at the time hilariously). But what he especially remembers about this book crossing his path was just his astonishment at somebody writing these things down and sharing them being candid with teenagers about such topics (remember, Burton is a Millennial and his childhood was a pre-Internet one!). That's what *How to be Happy* does too through the "character" of David he explores his own fumbles and foibles in such a charming and self-deprecating way that it's quite disarming for a reader, but then the moment comes when you do realise that these things being discussed are still somewhat

taboo in society (particularly honest discussions around mental health) and there is real bravery in David putting them on the page, sharing his story, stripping himself bare. One aspect in particular is his sexuality. A socially awkward teen who didn't fit into society's machismo stereotype of a sport-loving, rough-tumbling manly man, David discovered his voice through the self-expression of drama class and then struggled with what it meant that he was drawn to inherently feminine pursuits and activities. He assumed he was gay (a common epithet shouted at him by school bullies too) and this becomes a fascinating time for current self-reflection, as he does address the narrow gender definitions, which so confused his teenage self (and that still permeate in society today). But David's lust after several female classmates does eventually clue him into the fact that he is heterosexual, but now equipped with a unique and accepting view of sexuality and gender fluidity. The other big focus of the book, which is retold so tenderly, is David's mental health, and that of his family for his brothers' unique Asperger view of the world, as well as his family's history of depression. This is where David reminded me of the late, great YA author Ned Vizzini who wrote with such biting honesty about depression in his characters (drawn on his own experiences). In *It's Kind of a Funny Story* for instance, which began with the eerily accurate line "It's so hard to talk when you want to kill yourself." David has similarly in-your-face honesty when writing about his depression and anxiety, that I found to be both moving and vital. I also loved the tender heart of the book, a celebration of the friendships formed and trials overcome and also for the little things that actually become importantly intrinsic to who you grow up to be. That is, I loved David paying tribute to what he grew up loving and an acknowledgment of the stories, fandoms and connections he made that have had lasting influence on him (particularly considering he had a career in theatre!).

\*\*\*Mary and I discovered Harry Potter together, which, in terms of major life events, is almost as important as YOUR ACTUAL BIRTH. Lunchtimes regularly involved rushing to the library to pore over the latest instalment in Harry's adventures and attempting to make predictions about upcoming books. We would also discuss Star Wars, Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Discworld and Doctor Who at length. We were nerd soulmates. There are few reasons I would ever wish to be a teenager again, but I could be persuaded if it meant rediscovering all of these stories again for the first time and finding my unabashed passion for them.

\*\*\*And finally I

can't stress this enough How to be Happy is funny. Bitingly, embarrassingly, genuinely FUNNY. This sort of humour surely only comes when we're forced to reflect on our teenage selves and suddenly see the joke that was so hard to laugh at, at the time of adolescence. This book is gold, and if I could make it mandatory reading in schools or, maybe, not in schools but mandatory under-the-covers with a torchlight, late into the night reading for all those teenagers wondering why they feel this way, when will it get better and does anybody understand me? For those teenagers I'd like to gift them How to be Happy is funny because David won't claim to have all the answers, but he's been through the trenches and written about it in all his embarrassing teenage glory.

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