

An inside look at mental health education in high schools: An interview with a teenager

By: Laura Jones

The following interview was conducted with a teenager in high school. The subject consented and voluntarily answered the following questions. All names have been anonymized and place names changed.

Q: What is your personal experience with mental illness?

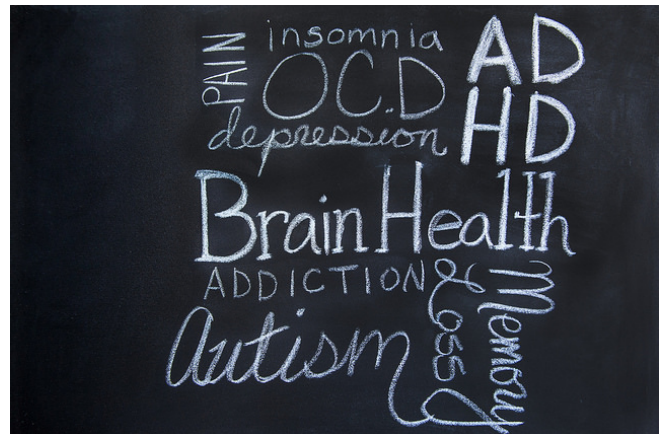
A: I've suffered from undiagnosed depression and some form of undiagnosed anxiety disorder for five years, maybe six. As I said undiagnosed, so it is kind of in the air.

Q: You mention that you are undiagnosed - how did you find out about these mental health conditions?

A: Family history mostly.

Q: Do you find there is open conversation about mental illness in your school ?

A: Uh, they try and make it seem like there is, but the students who are actually suffering from it are not speaking. There is a committee on the student government, for mental health awareness, that holds events throughout the year in collaboration with Jack.org. They tend to talk about mental health but do not provide any information about medical resources in the city. They do not talk about how youth can go about finding doctors or how to find out information about psychiatrists. We do have a health nurse who has some history in treating mental illness, but her main job in the school is normally related to sexual health. Even though she does have a background in mental health crisis training, most students do not know that and would not go to talk to her.



Mental health conditions by amenclinicsphotos ac, retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/125892716@N05/14419441390>

Q: How do you think teachers and administration could do a better job at promoting these services?

A: Talking about the right things is the biggest thing. Teachers sometimes provide resources for test and situational anxiety, but that is not something that affects everyone. Teachers do not talk about things like generalized anxiety or day to day depression. When they bring in guest speakers, they never bring in anyone who deals with it on a day to day basis, but rather

only extreme cases. They are raising awareness, but of both extremes of the spectrum, the very extreme and the situational but never the middle, which is where most people with mental illness are.

Q: Do you talk about mental illness openly with your friends?

A: Yes.

Q: Is there any discussion on suicide prevention in school?

A: When it comes up at mental health assemblies, pretty much they say don't do it and if you want to, to talk to somebody, and that is the gist of it.

Q: Do you think you would cope better if there was support offered in your school? And if so why?

A: Probably. Because if it's in your school it's accessible - if you can only access it through your doctor or hospital, it is not going to be used as much as if it was right down the hall.

Q: What would you like to see change about how mental health is discussed in school?

A: They need to tell people that even if they are not suffering, that they need to be able to talk to people who are. People find themselves uncomfortable and do not know how to deal with people in crises. They need to talk more about how certain disorders work, because if they do not, they will never be able to have a mature conversation on how to deal with it.