



# HOPE FOR FAMILIES

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[www.systemsofhope.org](http://www.systemsofhope.org)

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## Every Child has a Story

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### Stella's Story

“On my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday something in my brain broke. When I was 20 years old I was diagnosed with Bipolar II disorder. This was after years of therapy, four different psychiatric hospitalizations, and countless self inflicted wounds that required dozens of stitches. After 35 pounds starved from my body and a slew of prescription medications, including but not limited to Paxil, Celexa, Zoloft, Effexor and a blue bill that made my right eye twitch.

After all of this. After all of the highs and lows and the side effects. After all the doctors that called me difficult, depressed, confused, brilliant but yet troubled, dramatic, suicidal, creative, borderline, articulate, eating disorder, manic, substance addicted, childish, brave, loud, very receptive but untreatable. After all of this the only thing I knew about myself is I had this thing called Bipolar disorder.

As a young adult, I could talk myself off a psychiatric ward but I didn't know how to cook rice. I could rattle off dozens of facts about mental illness, medication dosages but I couldn't wear a t-shirt without people staring at the scars on my arms. I could speak in front of 500 people about living with Bipolar disorder but I couldn't look anyone in the eyes.

Today is my 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. eight years since my brain betrayed me. four years since I found out what happened. Some things have changed since then, some things have not. I've been hospitalized twice since then. I've been prescribed a variety of medications to soothe my rollercoaster mood swings.

Lamotrigine, Serequel, Lorazepam and Prozac. I've had a crisis or two and eventually I have learned to live with myself. Most importantly I have learned who I am and who I am not.

I am an artist, not a consolation of symptoms; I'm a photographer not a casualty of modern psychiatry. I am a person not a diagnosis.”



Watch Stella's story on YouTube. Visit [www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org) understanding mental illness— telling our stories

**Every child has a story. It's important to share stories like Stella's to reduce stigma and help others understand what it's like to live with mental illness. We all have our individual and unique way of communicating and today, more than ever, there are helpful tools to help children and their families tell their story. There is digital storytelling, poetry, journaling, drawing, photo story books, power point presentations, documentary films and more. Visit these sites for some examples of the great work being done.**

[www.storycenter.org](http://www.storycenter.org)

[www.its.ksbe.edu/dst](http://www.its.ksbe.edu/dst)

[www.benbehindhisvoices.com](http://www.benbehindhisvoices.com)

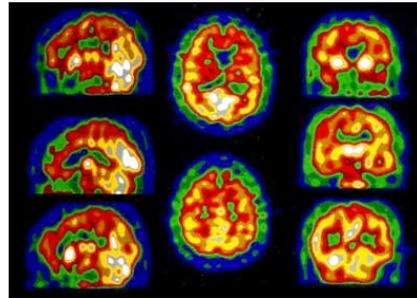
[www.spokenstories.org](http://www.spokenstories.org)

## Teen Depression

How can I tell if my teen is depressed? Experts at [www.teendepression.org](http://www.teendepression.org) say teens have always been emotional. Sometimes the influence of hormones, the pressures of school and friends and perhaps a job or family challenges can lead to depression. How do you know when it's typical teenage behavior or something more serious, like depression?

One of the most frequent signs in teenagers is irritability, but it must be accompanied by other symptoms and these changes must last longer than two weeks. When these changes in mood and behavior start to have an impact on daily life inside and away from home, it's likely time to seek help:

- Less focus or interest in school
- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Changes in social activities, like withdrawing from friends or interests
- Thoughts about death, dying or suicide
- Preoccupation with being perfect
- Sadness and despair
- Lack of concentration
- Frequent use of drugs and alcohol



Depression in teens usually is treated with a combination approach-cognitive behavior therapy to help change negative thoughts and actions coupled with medication. And the family is called upon as well, to help youth set realistic goals for themselves and to provide support for the teen. If you or a family member is suffering from severe depression, get help.

Call the Harris County Neuropsychiatric Center (NPC) 713-970-7070 helpline 24 hours a day for questions or support or visit [www.teendepression.org](http://www.teendepression.org)

## Facebook Users can Report Suicidal Behavior with New Online Tool

*By: Deborah Netburn, L.A. Times December 11, 2011*

Facebook has a new service that will enable users of the social network to report friends who have expressed suicidal thoughts and make sure they get an offer of help from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Friends will be able to report suicidal behavior by clicking a report option next to any content on the site and choosing suicidal content under the harmful behavior option, Facebook spokesman Frederic Wolens told Reuters.

Facebook will then send the suicidal person an email that will encourage them to call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (phone number included). The email will also include a link that will enable those who would prefer not to talk on the phone to begin a confidential online chat session with a crisis worker.

Facebook and Lifeline have been working together since 2006 to provide help to at-risk users of the social networking site, but this is the first time Facebook is making online chat sessions available to its users as an option for suicide prevention. (continued on page 3)

## Facebook *(continued)*

"Although the Lifeline on average handles 70,000 calls per month, we have heard from our Facebook fans and others that there are many people in crisis who don't feel comfortable picking up the phone," John Draper, Lifeline's project director, said in a statement. "This new service provides a way for them to get the help they need in the way they want it."

Lifeline said they will make sure that crisis center workers will be available 24 hours a day seven days a week to respond to Facebook users who prefer to use a chat session.

Surgeon General Regina M. Benjamin commended Facebook and Lifeline for addressing suicide — which she described as one of America's most tragic public health programs. In a statement she said that nearly 100 Americans die by suicide every day.

"We have effective treatments to help suicidal individuals regain hope and a desire to live and we know how powerful personal connections and support can be," she said.

"Therefore we as a nation must do everything we can to reach out and provide them with the help and hope needed to survive and return to productive lives with their family, friends and communities."

## EBP, CBT, MST, SOC.. What is It? Is There an APP for That?

It's funny, I can buy a new cell phone and have no problem standing at a counter for an hour and forty-five minutes listening to a sales person explain all the features and how they work. But, when I take my child to the doctor's office, I have a difficult time asking questions. Even when I tell myself before the visit that I will ask questions, I somehow walk right out of that office without ever opening my mouth. Why do I do that?

Although professionals have a responsibility to make sure services are fully understood, family members must communicate when they don't understand something. After all, this is our children's health we are talking about. A good friend of mine told me to write my questions down before my visit and I can either read the questions or just give the doctor the paper so I won't forget anything once all those medical terms start flying all around.

It just so happens, in every field there are acronyms or as some of us would say, a secret language and it can be intimidating. Children's mental health is no different. The truth is, EBP is much easier to say and spell than "evidence based practice". The same goes for CBT (cognitive behavior therapy), MST (multi-stigmatic therapy) and SOC (systems of care). The list goes on and on. Just like learning how my new phone works, new acronyms my children text me (LOL), I need to learn and understand the mental health terms as well.

It is a new language and I haven't found an app for that. When I leave not knowing what an acronym is or I forget the definition of something, I can always do what my daughter says, "Just 'Google' it or 'wiki' it mom!" or what my friend suggests, "Just call the doctor back!" Whatever the method, I'm determined to take the time and learn about the brain, its many features and how it works.



## Harris County Systems of Hope



### PARTNERING AGENCIES

HARRIS COUNTY CHILDREN AND  
ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES

DEPELCHIN CHILDREN'S CENTER

HARRIS COUNTY JUVENILE  
PROBATION DEPARTMENT

HARRIS COUNTY MHMRA

CITY OF HOUSTON HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES

HOUSTON FEDERATION OF FAMILIES  
FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

METROPOLITAN HOUSTON NAMI

WEST HOUSTON NAMI

Harris County Systems of Hope (SOH) vision is to create an accepting and embracing community that promotes optimal development and emotional well being of all children and their families, through the creation of a successful, accessible and integrated care system. We believe service providers and families have to work together in true partnership to ensure the best care for children with serious mental health disturbances. Harris County Systems of Hope began in 2005, with funding provided through a grant from the Substance Abuse and mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), providing the opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of a community-based system of care framework to provide children's mental health services.

With SAMHSA funding ending, Systems of Hope's plan is to operate under a "council" framework, and provide training and technical assistance to both partner and other community organizations to support the development of community-based, family-driven, youth-guided services throughout Harris County.

## Google It!

**Are you a leader in a family-run organization? Do you facilitate support groups? Do you organize advocacy efforts for children's mental health? Do you mentor other families and help find resources? If you answered yes to any of these questions, we invite you to join our Family Leaders Goggles Group!**

**Because Family Leaders have a unique role and tremendous responsibility in the work we do with children's mental health, we feel a place to go for peer support would provide a valuable resource. Networking opportunities are endless with a connection like this!**

**To join our Family Leadership Google Group, please visit the link at our website under Families as Partners tab. [www.systemsofhope.org](http://www.systemsofhope.org) or go to Google Groups and sign up today!**

Phone: 713-795-HOPE

Fax: 713-295-2522

Website: [www.systemsofhope.org](http://www.systemsofhope.org)

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