

Hi,

My name is Pam Theroux and I have a 16 year old son that is battling mental illness. He was diagnosed with Bipolar disorder as well as anxiety and a few other disorders 5 years ago when he was in the 6th grade. Now hearing some of the other stories from parents I realized that we are very lucky to have received the support that we did from our school district. I have to say that the district was always ready to help, but the problem was that no one really knew how. The teachers were total uneducated on mental illness. These are people that would be considered good teachers and they are very well liked. My daughter had them and loved them. But for my son it was a totally different world. His illness came on very suddenly, and he went from being a quite, well behaved, respectful, honor roll student to a child that was extremely disruptive in class, often inappropriate, and very disrespectful. Everyone knew something was wrong, but no one knew what it was. He was suspended three times in the next few months, and he was put into a private cubby in the back of his classroom and the other students were told not to talk to him (I didn't find out about this until the following year so nothing was ever done about it). These were good people and fine educators WITH ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA HOW TO HELP THESE CHILDREN. I worked in the school at that time, and we eventually put him into a PHP program. I went on to become as educated as possible in his disorder and mental illness in general. My son struggled through the next few years feeling very bullied by the students and teachers as well (some of this was part of his illness not necessarily real). When he started high school things really fell apart for him and he was hospitalized 4 times in 6 months. One area that was totally lacking was trying to bridge the gap each time he was released from the hospital and help him get back into school. There are no services for something like this and he was moved into a special ed program. This program was for children with behavioral problems not mental illness. This has been a problem again and again. When children with mental illness are placed in a classroom or school designed for children with behavior problems they quickly adapt these behaviors in order to fit in, and this compounds the problems they already have. I do really like the program that my son is in right now, but there are real problems that no one can find solutions to. One of the biggest is socialization. There are only six children in my son's high school class, and because my son was away so much and now is in a school out of town he has absolutely no friends. We can find no social outlets for him that he can handle. The other problem is the actual academics. So much of the time is spent on clinical and helping these children stay stable enough to function in society that there is very little time for academics. My son is very bright and I would have loved for him to go on to college, but I don't believe his education level is anywhere near as high as any college would require, and he will not have the social skills to be able to enter a traditional college.

To recap, the areas that in my experience are very lacking in education:

- Teacher and administration education on mental illness.
- Transitions help for children to enter back into the school after hospitalization.

- Socialization for children with mental illness.
- Education levels for these children.

Thank you for your time,

Pam Theroux