

Parent Diary

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teensfindinghope.org

Sunday

I wish I could go back in time. If only I had listened to my gut. I knew something wasn't right the way he kept shutting himself off from the rest of us, his hoodie pulled up over his head most of the time...snapping at everyone, sulking around, sleeping forever. Everyone kept telling me he was just being a teenager, but I knew it was something more. A mother knows these things.

Then this. when I found him lying in the hallway, the realization that he had taken a whole bottle of pills hit me like a steam engine. No wonder he had been acting so strangely, asking for Tylenol when he hates to take medicine, sitting with his hands over his head for hours. why had I gotten so frustrated with him when he wouldn't talk? Why hadn't I told him that it was going to be okay and that I was there for him, even if he didn't want to share? what kind of mother am I?

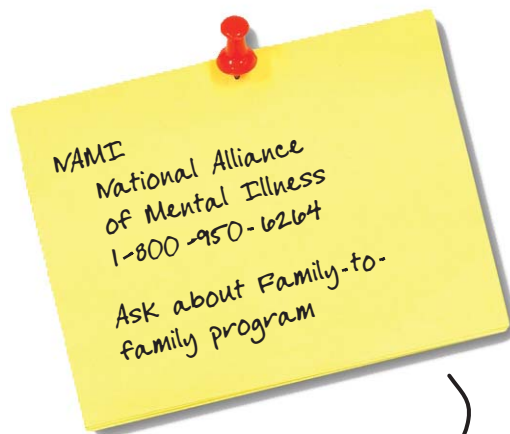
When the doctor came into the room, I could hardly breathe. I hated the way he looked at me with those judging eyes. How could he judge me at a time like this? My son almost died. Isn't that punishment enough? when he asked my son, Did you want to kill yourself? I couldn't even look. I dropped my eyes and studied my sweaty palms. My heart was pounding so loudly, I was afraid I wouldn't hear Jared's answer. Then again, I was afraid I would. Please say it was an accident, I was thinking in my head.

"I just wanted the pain to go away," Jared answered. The color drained from my face. I tried to keep breathing, struggling with a flood of heavy questions. what in the world had been going on with my son?

Why didn't he tell me what was happening? How could I have been so blind? How could I have missed all of the signs?

Memories of Jared came rushing back to me: the look of his face when he was born, the feel of his hand on the first day of school, the sound of his laugh as he played basketball. I clung to those memories, desperate to know if I had been there when he needed me. Was I ever a good mom? I snuck a peek at him. He was staring at the ceiling with a blank look on his face, his skin pale and clammy.

Leaving him at the hospital was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. I love him so much. I can't believe we almost lost him. Tom and I feel numb. We need to comfort Candace and Kole and let them know everything is okay, but it's so hard. It's hard to be positive when we feel so scared. What do we do now?



Has to have psychiatrist for meds
Ask doctor for recommendation

Schedule appt. with therapist

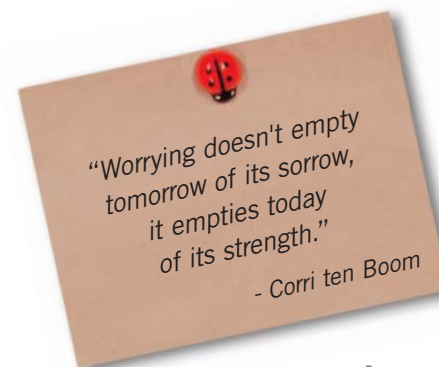
Thursday

I'm so exhausted, I can't sleep. Every time I close my eyes, I keep picturing Jared and the look in his eyes as we left him. I keep hearing the psychologist asking about the problems in our family. It's so stressful. I wish I could freeze time and get some rest without worrying. I'm tired of sitting at the hospital, meeting with specialists who just want to ask us about our home life.

"What about Jared?" I keep asking them, "what has he said? Has he told you what's bothering him?" They say they can't tell me because of patient confidentiality. Patient confidentiality? I'm his mother. How am I supposed to help him when no one will tell me what the problem is?

Why can't I get answers from anyone? They keep asking about our home. Yes, we've made mistakes as parents. Don't all parents make mistakes? But there isn't anything horrible going on in our home—no abuse, no drugs. We have good jobs. We have our faith. We love our kids. Why do I feel like everyone thinks we're responsible?

What did we do wrong? Could we have prevented this? How can we know what to do when no one is telling us anything?



I'm so worried about Jared. Someone help me know what to do.



Show me someone who has done something worthwhile and I'll show you someone who has overcome adversity.

- Lou Holtz

Saturday

People are starting to ask about Jared. What do I tell them? What will they think? The stress is making my shoulders feel like I'm in a vise. I feel so ashamed for not protecting my son.

I sit at work and hear people talking about their kids. I smile and join in the conversation, hoping the shame I feel doesn't show on my face. I push the negative thoughts down with each swallow of my sandwich, but the envy keeps creeping up, making it impossible to breathe.

It's so hard not to cry when I go back to my desk. I don't want people to know anything is wrong, so I focus on my work. But hidden inside are sobs so deep, they'd suck all of the energy out of me. Deep inside where no one sees, I mourn for the dreams I had for my son, and I mourn for the mother I thought I was. I wish desperately that I had done the things my coworkers had, so my son would be experiencing the same success as their children. I long for the chance to turn back time and do things differently.

But I can't do that. The past is done.

Monday

They've let Jared out already. I'm more nervous now bringing him home from the hospital than I was seventeen years ago. Tom's stocked the house with all of his favorite foods and movies, hoping this will distract him from noticing the empty medicine cabinet and knife drawer.

I try not to hover, but he looks so sad lying there on the couch. When did parenting become so tough? It was so much easier when he was a boy running around in his footie pajamas. I could just scoop him up in my arms and hold him tight, my love enough to ease his fears. Well, my love and a giant scoop of vanilla ice cream.

Now, though, the teen years have dug a chasm between us and the most I can do is give him a quick hug. Even then, I feel his muscles stiffen and hear his breath suck in and hold. My heart breaks the moment I feel him tense. Ice cream doesn't hold the sweetness it once did, so I just work quietly around the house and sneak glances in his direction. I hate to see him in such pain, and I can't help but wonder what secrets he's keeping from me.

Thoughts of the night bring terrifying visions to my mind. Tom says we have to trust the doctors, but I can tell by his eyes that he's just as worried as I am. What if Jared tries something again? What if he's successful this time?

Please keep my son safe tonight!



"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it."

- Helen Keller

Dr. Max Smith
Therapist
555-555-1234

wednesday

Nights are the hardest, trying to keep Jared distracted from the demons that haunt him. Endless hours watching TV. Together, talking about everything except the real issues, watching the sadness in his eyes. I pick around my words carefully, like a soldier in a mine field, knowing that one wrong phrase can result in an explosion none of us are prepared to handle.

How do we cope with this anger? The doctors told us depression is often expressed this way, but it's still a shock to have Jared react in this manner. It hurts to reach out to him in love and have him curse us, tell us we don't understand, beg us to leave him alone. We're only trying to help. Poor Candace doesn't understand why Jared's so angry. She's used to having a close relationship with her brother, and she crumbles each time he snaps at her.

We've tried to explain to her that he's in pain. She wants to know how to comfort him, but we don't know what to tell her, other than to give him some space. Maybe the therapist tomorrow can help us know what to say and how to act. It's so hard not knowing what to do. It seems like he takes everything we say or do the wrong way. Maybe this list of tips I found on the internet can help.

1. Listen.
2. It's okay to ask the tough questions.
3. Let him know that he is not alone.
4. Remind him mistakes do not equal failure.
5. Don't ask why he feels depressed.
6. Don't compare our past feelings to his depression. Don't tell him to look on the bright side.
7. Even if it doesn't happen right away, we will have you feeling better.

Depression and Bipolar wellness Guide

Friday

I don't know why I thought Max would be any different from the therapists at the hospital. Seems we're always sitting in the waiting room, wondering what's going on. He had the nerve to look me in the eye and tell me that there's nothing I can do for my son...he's almost eighteen. I have to let go and let my son deal with his own life. Easy for him to say. It's not his child sitting there, hurting, thinking of ways to end his own life. What kind of therapist is he? Thought people went into this line of work because they cared.

I guess I shouldn't make judgments after one meeting. All the books I'm reading say that therapy is crucial for Jared's healing. Still...I have an uneasy feeling about this guy. The only good thing that came from today was his suggestion for exercise. That might be good for Jared. Maybe it will help him get his mind off of things. At least it will get him out of the house for awhile. It's so hard seeing him holed up inside his room, wasting away. He's so thin and scraggly looking. Where is that handsome, fun-loving boy I used to have? I miss him. I miss him hanging

around the kitchen, sneaking snacks. I miss his crooked smile. I just want my son back. Will this medicine ever start working?

Wednesday

I talked with the school counselor today about Jared. She is letting the teachers know what has happened, and has assured me we can make changes to his schedule and work load. I'm so thankful they're working with me to make his return easier.

Thoughts of Jared pulling himself out of bed and finding the energy to sit through classes make my heart pump faster. It's going to be tough for him. But he's a strong kid; he's made it through tough things before. I just have to find a way to remind him of that strength.

I'm so intent in my thoughts of Jared, I don't notice I'm clenching my jaw until the pain shoots through my mind and clears my head. Candace is sitting by me and I wonder how long she's been there. More guilt. I'm so busy trying to take care of Jared, I'm not able to be the type of mom I want to be to Candace. I hold her close and hope my love is enough to make up for the absence.

Friday: Meeting at school to discuss 504 plan for Jared.

Reminder:
Do something special
with Candace.
Movie and ice cream?
Eli the Bipolar Bear
by Sharon Bracken
Good book for siblings

*The difference between
stumbling blocks and
stepping stones is how
you use them.*

– Unknown



Please let him get through this.

Saturday


Poor Jared. Not passing the driver's test has really done a number on him. He's so smart and capable, but how am I going to get him to believe that now?

The minute I saw his face in the parking lot, I knew. The disappointment in his eyes washed over me and settled heavily around my shoulders. "Lots of people have trouble passing the first time," I tried to assure him, but he pushed my words away with an angry punch to the dashboard.

Hearing my son calling himself a loser breaks my heart. He has so much going for him. I just wish he could see this for himself. I wish I could get him to understand that the world he lives in at school is so different than the real world. The real world is not so judgmental. It celebrates differences. It has tons of opportunities out there for him. He has a great life ahead. If only he would trust me.

Try having Jared help us with
Candace's computer project.
He's good with the computer.

We will be able to praise him for it.
That might be just the thing
to boost his confidence.



How to remind Jared to take meds:

1. ~~Note on bathroom mirror.~~
2. ~~Note on door.~~
3. Keep pills by Kitchen sink.
4. Pill box by Mt. Dew in fridge?

Tuesday

I think this medicine is actually going to work for Jared. He seems a little bit calmer now. He just has to remember to take it every day. I know he hates it when I ask him all the time, but I don't know what else to do. It's so important for it to build up in his system so he can start feeling better.

I've tried putting post-it notes on the bathroom mirror and the front door, but he didn't seem to notice them. Guess I'll try putting the meds in a pill box by the kitchen sink and see how that works.

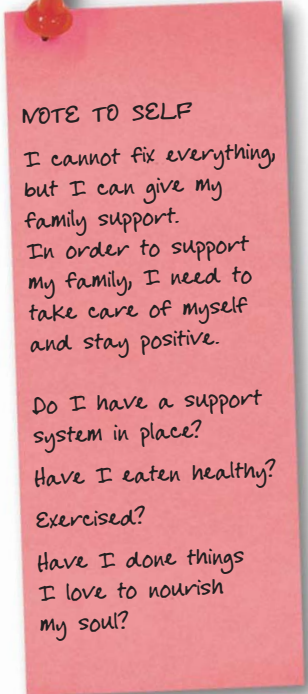
It's these little things that are so hard to figure out. How do we get him to routinely take medicine he doesn't want to take? How do we leave the house to do things when we're afraid he might die while we are gone? Why don't any of the books give us tips on how to make this easier?

Thursday

I woke up today feeling sad. Our family is hurting and I don't know how to fix it. And I find myself wondering if I did know the answers, would I have the strength to implement them? I'm so tired. My whole family is tired, and we are all struggling right now.

Tom has so much on his mind he doesn't realize he's snapping at us. The kids feel like he doesn't care, but when they say something to him, he gets hurt and defensive. I'm having trouble communicating with him, too. We are constantly misstating our thoughts, causing little disagreements and hurt feelings.

Candace cries every morning and wants to stay home. It's a daily struggle to get her off to school. Jared doesn't want to go to school either and is having a hard time keeping up with his classes. Even Kole is struggling and calls often, worry filling his voice. Maybe Kole needs to come home and see Jared for himself. Or I could send him a care package. It's too much. I can't keep up.



NOTE TO SELF

I cannot fix everything, but I can give my family support. In order to support my family, I need to take care of myself and stay positive.

Do I have a support system in place?

Have I eaten healthy?

Exercised?

Have I done things I love to nourish my soul?



*Begin doing what you want to do now.
We have only this moment,
sparkling like a star in our hand,
and melting like a snowflake.*

- Marie Ray



Saturday

Life is fragile. I had that thought last night as I looked in on my kids while they were sleeping. How thankful I am that they are alive and safe. I promised myself that I would walk into my kitchen this morning and ignore my sink full of dishes and my laundry room full of dirty clothes. I want to sit down with my kids and love and appreciate them while they are here. I want to hold my husband and tell him how thankful I am that I don't have to go through this alone. I want to see Kole and hear his stories and laugh again. I want to put the worries and work on hold.

Wednesday

The clouds have parted and the sun is beginning to shine through. Jared got an A on his English quiz. An A! He couldn't stop smiling. I'm so glad I got the English tutor for him. She's wonderful and is becoming a good friend for Jared.

On top of that good news, he also got a reffing job for rec football. He's taking his medicine, hanging out with the family, joking around. I'm very proud of him for working so hard. This may sound funny, but our house is feeling level again.



Thursday

So much for level. Just when I get one child doing well, another one has a blow-out. Now Kole's upset. He's frustrated, and I can tell from the way he stared down at his shoes that he's having a hard time dealing with guilt over his feelings. He loves and cares for his brother, and I know he worries about Jared and wants him to get better. But small thoughts of resentment are beginning to bubble up, and some of those thoughts burst through today.

Kole's frustrated with Jared's angry outbursts and the stress it creates. He's worried about Tom and me and the time we're spending trying to support Jared. He doesn't understand why Jared can't snap out of it. I tried to explain things, but sometimes depression is so hard to understand. How do I convey that this is not something easy for Jared to control?

"Snap out of it." Those words make me grit my teeth. So many people say that. Don't they think Jared would snap out of it if he could? Do they really think he wants to be this way?

Monday

My heart is breaking. I see my son heading down the wrong path and I don't know what to do. Candace woke me up last night because she heard Jared leave the house. Worst night I've ever spent, worrying where he could be, wondering if he was hurt. Or dead.

I caught Jared sneaking back into the house early in the morning. Tried to hide a beer bottle in the bushes when he saw me. When I told him how worried I was not knowing where he was, he laughed and rolled his eyes. Told me it was no big deal. I was being lame. Seeing my son start to hang out with the wrong crowd and make unsafe decisions is like having my heart wrung out.

He thinks he's just out having fun. Everybody does it. I'm being too old-fashioned. But I know better. I know the risks involved in doing these things, especially for someone who's depressed. It feels good for awhile, but the low can be devastating. It's not just a dip, but a bottomless pit he will find himself in. It will just add to his guilt. I have to get him to understand that drinking may seem like a fix, but it will only make his problems worse.

60% of kids in U.S. and Canada drink. 40% do not!

- Alcohol has only a temporary relaxing quality.
- It actually reduces sleep quality, which causes more stress.
- The effect people get from alcohol is only based on what they expect when they drink.
- Studies have been done with fake beer where people thought it was actual alcohol, and they reported it made them feel more confident and relaxed.

Frederick Muench, PhD

Saturday

I can't believe this is happening. Things keep getting worse and worse. I found marijuana in Jared's jeans today. First alcohol and now marijuana! When I confronted him, he said he didn't care. Told me to go ahead and take everything away. Ground him. He was a loser and couldn't do anything right, anyway. I flushed it down the toilet and told him that I loved him too much to let him do something harmful. He just looked at me with a blank look in his eyes. He had no expression, no expression at all. I just wanted to grab his shoulders and shake him, plead with him to please, please, please listen to me. He thinks he's just being a teen and everyone's doing it. But everyone's not doing it. And if they were, I still wouldn't want him to. It's dangerous. It can destroy his health and his future. It can destroy his life.

Depressed teens are twice as likely to use illicit drugs, especially marijuana, and become hooked on them.

It screws up memory and thinking.

It decreases muscle strength.

It positively correlates with depression and suicidal thoughts, even schizophrenia

Studies show someone who smokes 5 joints a week get as many cancer-causing chemicals as someone who smokes 1 pack of cigarettes per day!

Kid's site: www.freevibe.com

How to talk to your teens about drugs:

www.theantidrug.com

Sunday

where are you, Jared? You snuck out of the house last night and haven't come home tonight, either. I'm scared. I've called your phone, but you have it off. I've driven all over town, looking for you. I've talked with all of your friends. No one knows where you are or if they do, they won't tell me. I've called the police, but they won't do anything for a run-away. I just pray you ran away and are safe somewhere. I'm terrified that you may be lying in a ditch somewhere. Alone. Cold. Dead.

The world needs you, Jared. It doesn't need perfect cookie cutter people. It needs you. No one else can give the world what you can. No one else has your exact personality and experiences. No one else sees the world exactly as you do. You are cool in your uniqueness. You are needed. You are loved. Please believe in yourself. Please be safe. Please come home.

To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Monday

My son is home. He's quiet and brooding, a hint of attitude hidden just beneath the surface, but I'll take it. He's home. I don't know why I get to be one of the lucky ones. There are many scared moms out there whose kids are missing and will never see them again, whose kids have hurt themselves and are never coming back for a hug. I cry each time I think about how lucky I am that I have these moments, even if they're hard.

My son is hurting. He's making crazy decisions to try and fill the painful space inside. He's drinking and trying drugs. He's hanging out with a new crowd. He's cutting his arms — just found that out today. Everything he's doing is only making the pain worse in the long run. And I'm scared. I'm scared that he will really hurt himself before we figure out how to heal that empty space he has inside.

Why Do Kids Cut Themselves?

- Cutting is a way to cope with the pain of strong emotions, pressure, or upsetting situations.
- For some kids, it seems like a way of feeling in control.
- Although cutting may provide temporary relief, the relief doesn't last. The troubles that triggered it are still there.
- It can be addictive and hard to quit.

Let Jared know I will be here to talk when his feelings seem too hard to bear. Create a plan for what to do instead of cutting. websites: To Write Love on Her Arms Kidshealth.org

Happiness can be found,
even in the darkest of times,
if one only remembers to
turn on the light.
- Albus Dumbledore

Thursday

walked out on the therapist today. what an idiot. when I told him about Jared's drug use and running away for days, he said it was nice that he had friends to hang out with. what? It was nice for him to have friends that encourage drug use? It was nice he was starting to sneak out at night and self-medicate? Really? I'm paying for this advice?

I just want to cry. I'm so frustrated. why can't I find help for my son? I have to search for a new therapist now. I'll tell you something: I won't stop until I find a good one. I am going to advocate for my son, and I will not sit by and let my son continue to struggle. Jared needs help and understanding. So do all the kids out there like him. And their families.

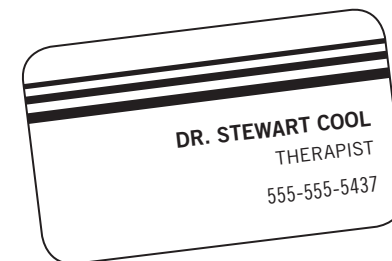
*Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go;
they merely determine where you start."*

- Nido Qubein

Friday

Finally broke down at work. Guess the pressure was too much and I just couldn't hold it in any more. when I confided in my friend, she got tears in her eyes and told me her son was struggling with similar issues. Then she gave me the name of a therapist they've used and told me he's really good at working with families.

what a blessing she was. I can't believe I didn't know she was going through this. why do people try to hide their struggles instead of sharing with one another? Life is so much easier when we have someone to help share our burdens and encourage us. Having a loved one with depression can be so hard. I feel guilty saying this, but I'm so glad to know that our family isn't the only one struggling.



Wednesday

I love our new therapist! Love him! He saw right through Jared's masks and finally got down to the issues for the first time since this has happened. Now if Jared will only learn to trust him and really, REALLY start sharing. My heart fills with hope just thinking about it. Healing is coming. I know it is.

Dr. Stew also gave us The Feeling Good Handbook by David Burns, M.D. Guess he'll be using some of the strategies from the book, and he encouraged us to learn more about what Jared is dealing with. Tom and I are going to learn all we can. Some of it seems like really scary stuff, and I'm not sure we can do it alone. Maybe we'll try the support group Stew suggested.

The best thing, though, was when Stew explained that Jared's condition wasn't our fault. When he told us that depression is caused from a chemical imbalance in the brain, tears of relief filled my eyes and spilled over. We couldn't have changed things, even if we knew ahead of time. Any number of triggers could have set Jared off. But the good news is that we can work together to support Jared and give him tools so when the bad times come again Jared will know what to do.

Don't spend energy on "How Jared got depression," but educate ourselves and our family so we know how we can make all of our lives better.

We can't take this depression away.

Our goal: Be the best parents we can. We will make mistakes, that's a given.

Hopefully, our children will feel our love and know that we can do it together.


Wednesday

Life is such a roller coaster: brief moments of happiness, followed by unexpected curves and challenges. I know I should raise my hands and enjoy the ride, but I can't. It's such a bumpy path, filled with a constant barrage of ups and downs: changing medicines, side effects, insurance issues, emotional struggles...This isn't the life I wanted for my son. This isn't the life I thought we had.

But I can't think about that now. Looking back only makes the ride more difficult. I need to focus on things which bring healing, things like the bracelet he's been wearing. It's been so helpful, especially since I don't have to ask him how he feels. He hates that question. Now I can see when he's hurting because he's wearing the bracelet, and I know I need to be around more to support him and not leave him alone during this time. Candace is so cute. She's wearing the purple one to let him know she's thinking about him. Don't know if Jared even notices, but the rest of us do. It's okay if I don't have all of the answers right now.

I don't know what the future holds for Jared, but I do know there is still a future for him. It may not be exactly as we pictured it; in fact, I have a good feeling it won't be. However, that doesn't mean it's a bad one. It's just an altered one. An altered one that fits Jared and is filled with all of the talent and personality he can bring to it.

I look forward to Jared's future and all of the struggles and turmoil it brings. Why? Because I know those hard times are surrounded by periods of intense happiness. Joy always cycles back around. Just like a roller coaster, you never know where the path will lead, you're surprised by the twists and turns, but in the end you're satisfied for having endured the challenge. Maybe some day I'll learn how to raise my hands and enjoy the journey. Until then I'll hang on and keep looking forward.



Jared,

Found a poem that I love.
Guess I love it so much
because it shows how
I feel.

I'm your mom, after all,
and the love I feel for
you is...well, it's hard to
describe. Nothing can come
close. I know this is going to
be a long journey for you,
Jared, but I promise I will
always be here. Even when
you feel you least deserve
it, I'll be here loving you.

And we can get through
this together.

We can.

And we will.

PARENT DIARY

I'll love you enough...

To ask you where you are going, with whom,
And what time you would be home.

I'll love you enough...

To insist that you save money and buy
A bike for yourself even though we can afford to buy one for you...

I'll love you enough...

To make you take the Snickers back to the store (with a bite out of it)
And tell the clerk, "I stole this yesterday and want to pay for it."

I'll love you enough...

To stand over you for two hours while you cleaned
Your room, a job that would have taken 15 minutes

I'll love you enough...

To let you see anger, disappointment and tears in my eyes.
Children must learn that their parents aren't perfect.

I'll love you enough...

To let you assume the responsibility for your actions
Even when the penalties are so harsh they break my heart.

I'll love you enough...

To say NO when I know you will hate me for it.
Those will be very difficult battles.
I'll be very consistent and win, because in the end, you will win too.

But most of all,

I'll love you enough...

That no matter what you do, or what you say
Or if you turn from our family, that our love will be there when you
come back.

- Anonymous

