

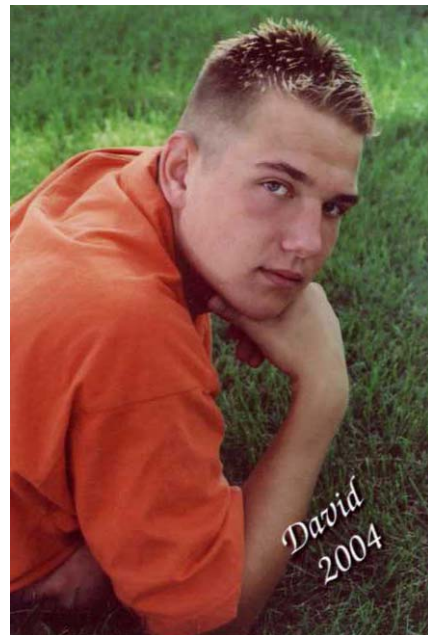
David

My name is David; I am 18 years old and graduated from a high school in central Nebraska last year. Currently, I am working as a DJ for a club in a nearby town. Last semester I attended a Community College. My goal is to work in radio as a DJ.

My strengths are: I am a third degree black belt in Tai Kwon Do, I can write rap and perform rap music, have a good sense of humor, helpful to others, a good listener, friendly, and a loyal friend. I helped start YES (Youth Encouraging Support) along with two other youth in Central Nebraska. YES is a group of kids who have mental health or behavioral challenges. We get together to help support each other and raise awareness about mental health issues.

My diagnoses are: ADHD, ODD, Bipolar, and suicidal tendencies. I got first diagnosed when I was in first grade by a doctor in my town. He decided I was ADHD because I couldn't sit still, pay attention, and basically I was jumping all over the room. As I got older I got more and more different diagnoses and more and more different medicines.

I have had an IEP since first grade. My verification is for Specific Learning Disability. I don't read very well and don't write very well either. I had to go to resource room for extra help in reading and writing. It was embarrassing to go there because kids would make fun of me. The teachers did help me learn to read and write better.



When I started school I had a lot of problems. I had trouble sitting still in class. I also wasn't a good reader and had trouble getting my work done in class because I couldn't concentrate. This would make my teachers mad at me. What was worse the kids in my class would laugh at me.

I started getting in angry in school. This got me into more trouble. I had to go the principal's office a lot. I was also having problems at home. I didn't like listening to any adults. That's when they told me I had ODD, or Oppositional Defiance Disorder.

I tired of all the crap in school and at home. One of my best friends committed suicide. It made me real depressed. I missed him a lot. He was able to get away from all his problems and school. I decided that I didn't want to be around anymore either. So, I decided to commit suicide too. I cut my wrists. But I didn't die, instead I had to go to a hospital in Omaha. I didn't like that very much. I didn't like being away from home. They told me that if I didn't straighten up, I would never be able to go back home and be with my family. Most of the stuff they wanted me to do was pretty lame, but I did what they wanted me to so I could go home.

What helped me the most in my life was my wraparound team and YES. My wraparound team was able to look at the stuff I was good at and stop repeating all the bad stuff I did or stuff I couldn't do. They didn't spend so much time on the negative. They found things like Tai Kwon Do that I liked to do and it helped to me to learn to control my anger. They listened to me and what I needed. At YES, I was able to talk with other kids like me who understood what I was going through. They gave me a chance to be a leader and talk to others about what has helped me to be successful. I have won lots of awards because of them and gotten to go to Washington, DC twice.

Things that weren't helpful were stuff like therapists saying they understand what I am going through. I've asked them if they were bipolar or ADHD, and they say no. They can't possibly understand it, unless you live with it. You would have no idea what it is like unless you have been there yourself. That's why YES is so important, we understand each other because we have shared some of the same problems.

Sometimes I feel like a lab rat. I have been on lots of different meds. Some of them have had horrible side effects. Everyone needs to understand about the side effects. It's just not about gaining weight, or being sleepy. Some of meds I've had have done the opposite. Some have made me do crazy stuff and act differently. If my behavior changes a lot, make sure that it's not my meds that are making me do crazy stuff.

Teachers please don't embarrass us. Don't make announcements over the intercom to come and take our medications. It's embarrassing and the other kids tease us about it. Please be patient with us and give us extra time and help if we need it. Don't always assume that we are bad kids. Help us achieve our dreams.

Finally, remember we are all different and don't treat all kids with the same diagnosis the same. We take different medications, our treatments are different, and our families and cultures are different. Of course, the way we learn is different. Treat us as an individual not as the "disorder". Remember we are ALL different. Take the time to find out who we REALLY are and what WE need as individuals to be successful.

David, Age 18
Nebraska