

OPINION

Don't be afraid to ask for help with your mental health

Editor's note: This opinion piece is about one individual's experience with mental illness. If you or a loved one is in need of assistance, please visit The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website, which has information about warning signs, at afsp.org. For immediate assistance, call 911 or contact the 24-hour hotline at 1-800-273-8255.

WRITER'S BLACK



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health?"

The issue of mental health has affected me personally. I'm a survivor of mental illness and suicidal thoughts.

For most of my life I grew up in Robbinsdale, attending the same school. My family took a brief hiatus to Dallas, Texas, when I was in second and third grade because my dad got a new job there. I was sad to leave all my friends and family so we could start again, but I later adjusted.

In 1998 my parents decided to return to Minnesota after my mother found out she was pregnant with my baby sister, so we could be closer to our family. After 10 years of being an only child, I

was ecstatic to finally have a sister of my own. That October my amazing sister, Shelby, was born.

When we moved back, I returned to my old school and experienced merciless bullying by my classmates who just a couple years before were my friends. I was made fun of for the way I looked and acted and was socially isolated from everyone in my grade. I began believing all the things I was taunted for were true, and I started hating myself.

I had a difficult time dealing with the bullying and didn't ask for help from my teachers or parents because I was embarrassed. At the same time I was being bullied, I unknowingly began showing signs of an anxiety disorder,

which wasn't officially diagnosed until I was an adult.

Throughout fourth and fifth grade, I became extremely depressed and anxious. I had no friends and no one to talk to. I never felt more alone.

By the time I was 11 years old I had endured two years of bullying, and I was reaching my rope's end, unsure with how to stop the bullying. One day I came home from school and decided I'd had enough. I wanted the pain to end and felt death was the only way out.

I was moments away from killing myself in my bedroom when I heard noises from the other side of the door. It was my baby sister laughing and playing around the house. I began to feel sad that I'd never get to see her grow up. I then started thinking about the pain I would cause my parents.

I remembered summer break was in a couple of months, so I decided to delay my plans, and luckily I never revisited them. Throughout the summer

my self-confidence grew as I took time for myself. By the time I returned to middle school the bullying slowly stopped and I was left alone.

I was still embarrassed about the bullying, and I wished I had asked for help from my parents.

Throughout high school, college and adulthood I started opening up more with my parents about my struggles with anxiety and depression. They were, and still are, some of my biggest supporters.

Starting in high school through today, I have seen a handful of counselors, psychiatrists and psychologists who have helped me deal with my mental illness. After reaching out to my parents and seeking help, I no longer felt hopeless and alone. While I struggle at times, I feel stronger today. What I want to tell kids is the fight gets easier.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 20% of youth ages 13-18 live with a mental health condition. In ad-

dition, 50% of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, while 75% appear by age 20. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in youth ages 10-24.

Children and teens struggling with trauma or a mental illness need more support from the people in their lives, but I also encourage kids not to be afraid to reach out for support. You may be surprised to learn there are more people in your corner than you thought.

It's OK to not be OK. You shouldn't be embarrassed or ashamed of struggling with your mental health. Just know if you're considering suicide — don't.

If you aren't hearing this from someone else, I'm going to tell you now: I love you! You're beautiful, you're amazing and you'll get through this.

If you are struggling, please reach out to someone now or call the 24-hour hotline at 1-800-273-8255.

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Election letters deadline

ABC Newspapers will not print election-related letters in the edition of Friday, Nov. 1. The deadline to submit an election-related letter for consideration is 5 p.m. Monday, Oct. 21.

ABC Newspapers welcomes letters to the editor from readers who live within our coverage areas. Limit letters to a maximum of 350 words. Writers will be limited to one published letter a month. Writers will also be limited to two letters on the same topic every six months.

Letters can be submitted to jonathan.young@ecm-inc.com. Please include, for publication, your name and city of residence. Also include your address and a phone number for verification. Letters will be edited for grammar, spelling, clarity and libel. Publication is at the discretion of ABC Newspapers.

Nathan

Continued from page 4

I shared. Also, \$300,000 of the \$3 million apparently hasn't yet been completely committed. Hopefully some of that will go to meeting what Simmons and Song-Brave

agree are immediate needs of emergency shelter in the metro area.

Joe Nathan, formerly a Minnesota public school teacher, administrator and PTA president, directs the Center for School Change. Reactions welcome, joe@centerforschoolchange.org.