

[http://www.waaytv.com/mentalhealthmaze/the-mental-health-maze-of-coping-with-mental-illness-in/article\\_8b9029b4-d5da-11e5-ae74-f70b0b82769e.html](http://www.waaytv.com/mentalhealthmaze/the-mental-health-maze-of-coping-with-mental-illness-in/article_8b9029b4-d5da-11e5-ae74-f70b0b82769e.html)

## The mental health maze of coping with mental illness in teens

Christine Flores cflores@waaytv.com Updated 4 hrs ago



The mental health maze of coping with mental illness in teens.

Recent trends are now showing teens are being diagnosed with a mental illness at an earlier age, according to experts.

WAAY 31 sat down with a family whose teen was diagnosed with a list of mental illnesses at the age of 16, and has only recently learned how to manage it all.

"You just wonder, what could I have done? What am I doing wrong? It's very distressing," says the mother of a mentally ill patient, Mary.

Those were the questions Mary and her husband Kevin, faced after their daughter's first visit to a psychiatrist. Their daughter, Rebecca, was 16 at the time.

"At first, it was just depression and anxiety," says Mary.

But Rebecca and her parents felt there was more going on.

"I started getting manic, and stuff like that, I was psychotic," explains Rebecca.

It was a time of trial and error for the teen which included 30 different medications, everyday. As well as countless visits to the hospital and inpatient care.

"We found that medications would work for a little bit and then they would stop working right. It was hard. It was stressful," says Kevin.

"You feel like you want to be able to fix whatever is wrong with your child," says Mary. "But you just

have to accept that we cannot fix this. We just have to try and get the best care that we can for her."

By the age of 19 Rebecca's list of diagnosis included anxiety, depression, ADHD, schizoaffective bipolar type, and autism.

While medications may help, therapists say family support and understanding is just as important.

"The more we can get the families involved, in counseling and working with the kids, the better luck we'll have in treating the child," explains Child and Family Therapist Mark Ray.

The recent closure of mental health hospitals and inpatient facilities, across the state, have made it harder for patients, like Rebecca, to get the help they need. But that hasn't stopped the various free and low cost support groups like the National Association of Mental Illness and the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama.

"We have quite a few outpatient facilities around here. and inpatient treatment. We're keeping an eye on Medicaid funding situation as well," says Ray.

At 22-years-old Rebecca is proud to say she has a good grasp of her illness. She takes only 3 medications and attends a faith based support group.

"Mental illness is not a choice. I would never chose to live this way and have to take all these medications. I would never chose to be miserable. Mental illness is just like cancer. It's just like epilepsy, only it's a brain disorder. It's a chemical imbalance in your brain," says Rebecca.

[Here](#) is a list of organizations and support groups serving north Alabama.

You can also contact [NAMI](#) for a list of free and low cost support groups and mentors.

NAMI Huntsville has several support groups that meet regularly throughout the week. You can find a list and contact information [here](#).

The Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama also has a variety of resources and programs to offer. You can find more information [here](#).

WAAY 31 is teaming up with Wellstone Behavioral Health. We're hosting a 'Mental Health Maze' hotline on Friday. Lines will be open from 6A.M.to 6P.M.

---

Christine Flores