

# 10 Things I Wish My Teacher Knew About Mental Illness

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Dear Educators:

This list was created from the perspective of students with mental illness. We hope you find it useful.

- **Be Understanding and Compassionate**

“It’s Not drama and I’m Not Faking it”  
Depression, Anxiety, Bipolar Disorder, etc...are all illnesses similar to cancer.  
Students cannot “just get over it”. Mental illness can go into remission with the proper treatment and medication, but it takes time.

- **Mental Illness can present itself in various physical forms**

Fatigue, insomnia, muscle pain, headaches, weight-loss, weight-gain, hyper-activity

- **Mental Illness can be present in young children**

Educators should look for signs and symptoms, early diagnosis is important.

- **Remember that students have lives outside of school**

Children have troubles just like adults. Adults bring their stresses from home to work and

children bring their stresses to school. Teachers may need to adjust their requirements to meet their students’ reality.

- **Talk to your students privately**

Learn about your students’ lives  
Find out their needs  
Ask your students how you can help

- **Encourage your students and maintain faith in their skills and abilities, ALWAYS**

A little extra love and attention goes along way with students, especially with those who are not feeling loved at home. A teacher’s love and encouragement can transform a student’s perception of him/herself and ultimately the student’s future.

- **Speak in positive tones and respond nicely**

A teacher’s tones and comments will have a greater impact on students with mental illness.

- **Know about IDEA, ADA and students’ rights**

Students with mental illness qualify for IEPs just like students with developmental disabilities.

- **Know about mental illness and the symptoms**

- **Know about local mental health resources for youth and families**

