

# A Mother's Day Gift

**B**rian was born on Mother's Day, and his mother thought he was the perfect gift. The first grandchild in the family, everyone "oohed" and "ahed" over every new accomplishment. It wasn't long before he was talking. In fact, he talked nonstop. Gifted with a sharp, incisive mind, he wore everyone down with his endless determination to win an argument. Maybe he'd become a lawyer someday, thought his proud parents. He breezed through school, one of the smartest in his class. And he was popular, too.

But by his junior year in high school, there began to be signs that things were not as picture perfect as they should have been. He studied very little now, telling his parents he couldn't concentrate. And he stopped shaving. He said he looked better that way.

Then came summer. Brian had taken a job as a counselor-in-training at a sleep-away camp. Annoyed by the cabin bully, he challenged him to a wrestling match. Brian pinned him easily and walked away. Suddenly, he was attacked by his opponent who had now recovered sufficiently to give him a bruising punch in the eye. Brian demanded immediate punishment for his attacker. The camp director responded by putting the bully on camp restriction for the weekend, but Brian wasn't satisfied.

Back home he continued to think endlessly about the incident. He wanted his parents to sue the camp. They were sympathetic, but insisted it was time for him to put the incident behind him. So one day Brian skipped school to go into the city to see a district attorney. If his parents wouldn't help him, he would sue the camp himself. Everyone tried to persuade him that he was overreacting, but months went by and his anger only grew worse. He felt abandoned and began spending most of his time alone in his room. He even refused to go to school and wouldn't see any of his friends. Sometimes late at night his parents could hear him sobbing; his sleepless nights became their sleepless nights as well.

What had they done wrong, and what could possibly be done to get things back to the way they were?

One night in desperation they decided to have one more talk with Brian. Apprehensively, they entered his room. He wasn't in his bed, but they found him cowering in a corner, wild-eyed with fright. Brian said he was terrified because the walls were bugged and the CIA was out to get him.

At last his parents understood where all the strange events of the past few months had been heading. With great reluctance, they accepted the advice of a psychiatrist and agreed to hospitalize their son. The battle against schizophrenia had begun.

## Answer the following questions:

1. If Brian were your close friend, what would you have thought was wrong with him in the months after he returned from camp?
2. What was it about his behavior that would have given you cause for concern?
3. How do you think Brian's family felt when this happened to him?
4. Do you think his parents blame themselves for what happened to Brian? Should they?
5. What do you think can be done to help Brian get better?

## Follow Up Discussion

### Discuss:

If Brian were your close friend, what would you have thought was wrong with him in the months after he returned from camp?

### Points to make:

- Mental illness is often mistaken for drug or alcohol abuse. People with mental illness often use these substances to relieve their symptoms.
- Mental illness is a physical illness. Something has gone wrong in the chemistry or structure of the brain.

### Discuss:

What was it about his behavior that would have given you cause for concern?

### Points to make:

- Mental illness causes a dramatic change in behavior that persists and is serious.
- Brian had schizophrenia, but there are other forms of mental illness such as depression, bipolar disorder, and obsessive compulsive disorder, which are also characterized by changes in some or all of the following:

sleeping	concentration
socialization	emotional response
energy	eating habits
way of thinking	physical appearance

### Discuss:

How do you think Brian's family felt when this happened to him?

### Points to make:

They were devastated. They agonized over the impact Brian's illness might have on his future. When someone develops mental illness it affects everyone in the family as well as the person who is ill.

### Discuss:

Do you think his parents blame themselves for what happened to Brian? Should they?

### Points to make:

- Parents used to be blamed for causing schizophrenia and other forms of mental illness, but in the last decade scientists have proved that there are distinct changes in the brain that occur in people with various forms of mental illness.
- Mental illnesses are brain disorders. They are physical illnesses like heart disease or diabetes. Just like any other organ in the body, the brain can get sick.
- It is a no-fault illness. Neither the family nor the person with mental illness is to blame.

### Discuss:

What do you think can be done to help Brian get better?

### Points to make:

- Mental illness is treatable with medication.
- Talking to a therapist can also help.
- Speak to a guidance counselor, school psychologist, or health teacher if you believe that you or a friend might be developing a mental illness.
- Support someone who is struggling with mental illness. Continue to be a friend.

## Warning Signs of Mental Illness

- Personality changes
- Extreme anxiety or irrational fears
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Suicidal thoughts
- Lack of emotion
- Lack of appetite
- Social isolation
- Too much sleep
- Too little sleep
- Emotional extremes or outbursts
- Inability to concentrate
- Inability to cope
- Unexplained changes in mood
- Bizarre behavior or speech

**CAUTION:** Only a trained professional can make a diagnosis of mental illness. In making a diagnosis consideration is given to the number of symptoms, their severity, and duration.