

What It's Like to Have Schizophrenia

by Lisa Halpern from lhj.com

Here are four things you've probably heard about people who have schizophrenia. Since I've struggled with the disease for almost my entire life, I'm more than qualified to tell you if they're true or false.

1. They hear voices. Yep, I hear them. Those are real, at least to me.
2. They're paranoid. True. For years I was pretty sure people were out to get me.
3. They commit violent crimes. No, that's not a symptom. Those of us with schizophrenia tend to be secretive and avoid human contact. We're more likely to hurt ourselves.
4. They commit suicide. Unfortunately, true. About 40% of us try it, and 10 - 13% succeed. The voices I heard told me to kill myself, and I came pretty close to doing it -- until I finally got help.

I was in high school when I started hearing the voices. Those voices seemed absolutely real to me -- like having hallucinations that you hear.

I got accepted to Duke University, where I majored in economics and public policy. At first I made friends, joined a sorority. But by my sophomore year I thought that people were talking about me and laughing at me all the time. I was so afraid of everyone that I quit the clubs and started isolating myself more and more.

'Around this time I saw a doctor who diagnosed me



with depression.

'My life really fell apart when I started graduate school at Harvard for a master's degree in public policy. I was hearing voices all the time.

Getting a diagnosis of schizophrenia is very complicated. You have to have symptoms for at least six months. And, of course, you have to actually share

what your symptoms are. I needed medications, too. I took antidepressants and I tried many antipsychotic drugs.

My doctor always believed, even when I couldn't read or write, that I would go back to Harvard. His faith in my future made all the difference. When I finally did go back, it was definitely difficult, but I got my master's degree.

I still hear the voices at times. My life is so different now, and I'm sad I missed out on all kinds of normal relationships for so long.

But I'm doing the best I've ever done. I have tremendous support from my family, my friends, and my doctors. It's really challenging. And it takes guts to tell this story. But it's about the fight -- a fight I'm winning.

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NAMI Greater Phoenix is proud to offer this class for the 6th time in Maricopa County!

For information or to register:
Contact Laura
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NamiMaricopaEdu@gmail.com

Wednesdays
6:00 - 8:30 pm
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Paradise Valley Hospital
Cafeteria Classroom B
3929 E. Bell Road
Phoenix, AZ