

May 2014—What My Friends Don't Know About Me

Volume 4: Issue 6



aletheia

www.lhsaletheia.org

Mission

Aletheia (ah-LAY-thee-uh), which means “truth” in Greek, is a student outreach publication that strives to provide a voice for all students at Lynbrook High School. Inspired by Los Gatos High's *Reality Check* and Monta Vista's *Verdadera*, *Aletheia* was created to facilitate communication and overcome stigmas concerning prevalent and taboo issues within the Lynbrook community.

About

At the beginning of the school year, the *Aletheia* staff designates a list of monthly topics pertaining to the realities of high school. Each issue comprises of firsthand experiences submitted anonymously by Lynbrook students and alumni, professional articles relating to that month's theme, and resources compiled by the student staff. Finalized newsletters are uploaded online and emailed to Lynbrook families who have requested to be on the mailing list. Back issues can be found on our website, www.lhsaletheia.org, under Archives.

The content in *Aletheia* is composed by the students of Lynbrook High School in San Jose, California. Ideas and opinions expressed within the publication are not necessarily reflected by members of the school administration or faculty.

This is the sixth issue of *Aletheia* for the 2013-14 school year.

Submissions

All Lynbrook students and alumni are eligible to submit stories. We publish all submissions that adhere to our guidelines, which are posted on the website. The Aletheia staff is committed to preserving the integrity of your content and will not make any changes, with exception to certain profanity (which are asterisked-out) and basic spelling errors. We do not edit stories for grammar or syntax.

Our summer topic is Insecurities; stories are due by September 5th. If you are interested in contributing, a submission box and a suggestion form for future topics are both available online.

*Expressing what
remains unspoken.*

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My friends don't know that sometimes they hurt me. No matter how "okay" i look on the outside, on the inside, I feel like I'm dying. And they don't see that. This is why I don't even talk to them anymore because they don't get me. I've been keeping things like this from them for a long time. I thought that maybe someone would notice and help, but only my parents have noticed. Guess that shows that I have absolutely no social life. I would not even tell these friends any of my secrets. They've known me since 6th grade and they can't even tell when I need help. But on the other hand, I'm always there for them, and I can tell in a snap that something is off. But no one can help me. There are a lot of things my friends don't know about me. Like once I had a real moment with a guy, but I didn't tell them. I screwed that relationship up, and I told no one because none of my friends actually care what I'm going through. Their rich minds are so self-involved.

"Tears are words the heart can't express"

-Unknown Author

My secret: I've had a recurring crush on the same guy for the past two years. If my life were a romance novel, you would abandon the book frustrated by the protagonist's indecision. My indecision is rooted in the fear of consequences. I've been raised to believe that all romantic relationships are post-college journeys, never to be initiated any earlier. I've been taught to always be suspicious of the opposite gender. The first time I shared the inklings of feelings with my parents, I was instantly rebuked. Although I was only in kindergarten, the experience still traumatized me. I have never found the courage to share my feelings with them again. Or with my sister. Or with anyone who could possibly tell them. Another plausible consequence would be a bridge burned. My crush and I have been friends for many years. We've supported each other and regularly meet to share our joys and complaints in life. To the best of my understanding, these substantial conversations are only possible due to our longstanding friendship. I'm afraid that if we ever get together, this openness will irreversibly change. With the pressure to be perfect for one another, we'll stop sharing what makes us feel imperfect, fragile, and powerless against the "slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune." I feel that our friendship is more durable than what our romantic relationship would ever be. We can be mad at

each other over trivial matters and still be friends, but trivial matters can cause either one of us to question the relationship and walk away. I am also afraid of being called a hypocrite. For so long, I have mocked relationships because it was more convenient than trying to be a romantic. I insert a personal anecdote about an unfruitful experience sophomore year when appropriate, but I never outright approve of relationships. Now I regret characterizing myself that way because I don't know who I can trust with my feelings. My last fear is of judgment. "It's your senior year. What do you have to lose?" What you don't know is that it's his junior year, and time has already been lost. A senior friend was harshly judged for getting a boyfriend with only two months left in school. Not long after graduation, their relationship ended. The duration of a relationship is often the measure of success, so mine would be considered a vain effort. Even if I mustered the courage to ask him out, our time together would be limited by the date I leave for college. It makes me feel a bit like Gatsby, wanting to manipulate time. I've been wanting to ask for advice, but I need someone who is close enough to understand all the characters involved and yet distant enough from my circle of friends to protect my secret.

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Well... I'd never tell some of my more attractive friends that I think about them while I masturbate. Thank God for anonymity.

"In a full heart there is room for everything, and in an empty heart there is room for nothing."

-Antonio Porchia

To start off, I want to say that I am a Lynbrook alumnus. I am now at college, and I love college life-- more than high school life for many reasons. I've grown and come to terms with myself and with my past. And I have to say, I'm going to interpret this prompt to "What My High School Friends Didn't Know About Me," because many of my college friends do know about what I am about to share. In high school, I didn't even realize what I was going through was what it was, but now I can see that I am a survivor of psychological and physical child abuse. I always knew there was something gravely wrong in

my life, because I always felt dissatisfied, looked for an escape, and struggled with bouts of depression, suicidal thoughts, and incredibly low self-esteem. I didn't know that what was happening was abuse, because I didn't know what good parenting looked like. I never received it. But I can say now, as a psychology major looking to pursue a career in clinical psychology, that psychologically speaking, what I went through was abuse. I was silenced by the Asian culture that condones physical discipline, the taboo around child abuse, and the fact that our immediate family is isolated from the rest of my family by the Pacific Ocean, but I have gone through much healing, clarity, and growth in me through psychotherapy and my faith the past year. It was a long process, and like a frog boiling in water, I didn't realize what I was in until someone finally intervened and brought me to a counselor (and let me tell you, this someone was /not/ my parents, but another adult). Ever since I was in elementary school, I was acclimated to abuse that exacerbated until my senior year of high school. Outside, I was the picture-perfect Lynbrook student-- quiet but nonetheless with a stable group of friends, straight A's, good resume of leadership in extracurricular activities, well-behaved. But at home, I had many nights of ripped hair, scars on my arms and face, kicked limbs, verbal abuse, emotional manipulation, doors torn from hinges, screams and crying that went long into the night, swollen black eyes, bleeding foreheads, and threats that pushed me to despair, rebellion, and emotional chaos which I only escaped through exhaustion and sleep. The terror, evil, gruesomeness, and depressiveness of those nights are endless. The next morning, I would wash my face, hide the marks, and go to school. People would ask me if I was okay, and I would lie, lie, lie, lie, lie-- because that was the only thing I knew how to do. As illogical as this sounds, I loved my parents, and I wanted to protect them (this is the tendency of many victims, and this is how they are kept in a cycle of abuse. this is why it's so important for other people to intervene). You may wonder why I never spoke out. How in the world I could possibly think that sort of lifestyle was "normal." Because I thought it was normal for 18 years. But the thing is, I was trained throughout my life to be silent. And the few times I mustered the courage to mention there was something wrong with my family, I was silenced-- told that it was my duty as a daughter and a Christian to serve my parents, to be a good daughter. Told that it was normal for Asian

parents to spank their children. But let me tell you-- what I went through was not acceptable "discipline." It was capricious, undeserved, excessive, and destructive. It depended not on my behavior but on the capricious emotional state of someone I had no control over. And my father did not do anything to stop it, because he still does not recognize the gravity of what it did to me. But I was done with it. When I finally got help, I was so incredibly relieved. I was sick of feeling like I was the most worthless, disgusting person alive-- someone worth killing. Because frankly and objectively, I never did anything to deserve that sort of self-hatred. I had such a low self-esteem, but I really am not an evil person-- I try hard in school, try to love others, genuinely empathize with people, and hold everyone with respect. Now, I realize I had a low self-esteem because the message the abuse conveyed to me was that I deserved it. I believed I was a specially evil person, who deserved the sort of treatment that I would never deem acceptable to anyone. But through therapy, I realized that what I had gone through was an evil-- something that I did not deserve, that no one deserves. It was an intrusion of my natural human rights. The past 10 years of my life, I had lived with a flawed perception that only harmed me. So I stood up for myself. I went through therapy and came to terms with my past. Do I have bitterness against my parents? When I think of all the horrible abuse I went through, the abuse that my sibling had to go through, I shake with fury. But where does that fury lead me? It leads me to pent-up anger, because my parents will never listen to me. I tried to communicate with them, but it was all futile-- I now understand that in order for my parents to accept what happened was abuse, they would have to come to terms with the truth, which was that they violently and emotionally wronged their own children whom they love (love is an action, and what they did to me is /not/ love, but I use this term because I know they love me in their own irrational way). The likelihood of their accepting this is not high, and I cannot base my emotional security on their actions anymore. I know too well that anger and pent-up emotions lead to destruction, violence, and evil. So I have come to recognize that what my parents did was not okay. It was not rational. But I choose to respect my parents with a respect that I did not receive from them, because I believe every human being, including my parents, do not deserve to be treated in that way. I will never unquestioningly trust my parents again, because I don't want to endanger myself. But from an emotional distance (a distance that

is necessary for my own protection) I choose to honor my parents because I respect myself. I don't need more hatred, anger, and bitterness in my life. I choose to love myself and channel my sense of injustice in a positive way: to stand up for others in situations of child abuse, which is why I am pursuing clinical psychology. I write this because I know that child abuse is a real, prevalent issue. Society tends toward silencing it, because it is so ugly. People shy away from it, sugar coat it. But please, please, do not sugar coat it. This only silences the victim and protects the abuser. Speak out for the victims' rights and support them. Do not blame them, because they are already socialized to blame themselves.

"To open your heart to someone means exposing the scars of the past."

-Unknown Author

My "friends". For the past year, I've had internal debates about whether I should even be referring to them as my friends. Are friends the people who simply talk to you when you're bored? Or are they the people who are there to support you during your tough times? What my friends don't know about me -- basically everything. My friends don't know that I've been having the worst six months of my life. My friends don't know that I witnessed someone almost die and then survive, only to almost die once again. My friends don't know that I'm actually not "moody", but that instead I've been depressed and unable to cope with all the stress in my life. My friends don't know that they're the main reason for my unhappiness. My friends don't know that I don't trust them with anything; that I don't trust them because I've been hurt badly in the past by their actions, as well as other backstabbers and previous "friends". They don't know that all I need is support and love to hold me up. They don't know that I'm always doing everything in my power to help them out and please them with whatever they want, and that I feel forgotten on a 24/7 basis. They don't know how selfish I believe they are. My friends don't know that I've been hiding my feelings from them. They think that I'm strong and funny and a great person, when in reality my blood boils every second I think of them. They don't know that they've hurt me so much that I can't heal. There should be a lot of positive things for me to list about my "friends". But my list is empty. My

friends don't even know that I have the audacity to write this. They don't know that I have a new page in my book, and that if I can help it, they won't be a part of it. They just don't know me.

"Wherever you go, go with all your heart."

-Confucius

I jack off

~ ~ ~

In some groups of friends, the people are a bit detached. I think girls, in general are a bit less detached than guys, but the most closely-knit cliques are the ones that consist of all guys. For instance, (I'm a guy) my posse consists of about eight guys, and we let each other in on EVERYTHING. There is not a single thing that I could know about that I wouldn't feel comfortable sharing with my clique. What I've noticed about guys is, that we often simply hang out by insulting each other. However, none of the friends I have actually mean any of their insults. It is just in our human nature. I know I can trust my friends with anything because in all important dilemmas, my friends are always there for me. For instance, when my mom had to go to the hospital for a heart attack, my friends came to my house to bring me food in order to try and prevent me from being utterly depressed. In order to construct that kind of a friendship bond, the members of a clique have to connect in a way in which the entire posse lets each other in on everything. My friends let me in on all their business so I can give them all my personal feedback and advice, and I let my friends in on all of my business so they can do the same for me. This advice and feedback creates mutual care and trust. The only problem with such a closely-knit posse is that it's really hard for a new person to join, but not be detached. We've been so closely-knit for years, and it would take a while for someone new to adapt. My friends know everything important about me. All the times I've gotten in trouble. All the times I cheated on academic work. All my sexual desires and experiences. I know the same about them. Really, the only things my friends don't know about me are the unimportant things like type of food I had for dinner at my uncle's wedding.

Although I am thankful for my friends who always support and encourage me, I sometimes feel that I am inferior to everyone else in terms of grades. There have been so many times when I cried at home and sometimes, at school, over my grades and overall gpa after I compared myself with some of my peers. I felt that I didn't fit in with everyone, and while my friends got A's in challenging classes, I ended up getting B's, even though we had the same teacher. I began developing an inferiority complex with everyone around me; whenever I saw peers of mine that were doing academically better than me, I felt depressed, unmotivated, and left out, as if I didn't belong in their world. I kept these feelings to myself because I knew that my friends would feel guilty if they knew that I felt inferior to them. Although everyone tells me that "grades don't define who you are," I feel that grades DO define who I am. I really wish I could be as smart and talented as my friends so that I won't feel left out anymore.

"A friend is someone who knows all about you and still loves you."

-Elbert Hubbard

My friends don't know that I'm probably the horniest person they've ever met.

~ ~ ~

I would never tell my friends that for a very short time, I liked looking for Drarry fics. Because that would just be too embarrassing. Okay, more seriously, I would never tell my friends that...1) Well, there's a story that I'm writing, and one of the main character's parents were emotionally abusive, causing the poor kid to have terrible self-esteem and deal with their problems in self-destructive ways. Anyway, the thing I would never tell my friends? That character is heavily based off of...me. 2) Sometimes I cry while I'm in bed and supposed to be sleeping. Not often, but sometimes. 3) I get scared of extremely big weeds. 4) I have a secret blog on tumblr. I haven't told anyone that it's mine. 5) Because I am autistic, sometimes I have sensory overloads. One of the things that overloads me? Brightly flashing lights, loud music in a closed room, and people touching me without telling me first. This is why I will NEVER go to a dance. Ever. 6) I still love Madeleine and Winnie the Pooh. 7) I always liked things in the Uncanny Valley. Most examples people

show me don't even frighten me. 8) I am legitimately terrified about genetic engineering. Want to know why? Because I am terrified that people like me will be wiped out - that is, autistics. Think that sounds ridiculous? Think again. When I type "autistics" in Google, the first choice google offered was: "autistics should die". And when I went to the Tech Museum, I saw a video that showed some incredibly talented scientists had decided to make it their life's work to locate "the autism gene", so they could "end the suffering of autistics." 9) And finally, once I scratched my ears so hard they bled, and I didn't even notice. That incident scared me so much that I never scratch myself anymore.

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None of my friends know that I spent the entire day yesterday crying. It was for a really stupid reason. Maybe that's why I can't bring myself to talk about it. Because I think they'll judge me or something. I don't know. None of my friends know that I feel like our friendship has become stagnant, deteriorating slowly by slowly over the years. I still care a lot about them, but when we spend time together I don't know what to say anymore. I don't know them anymore. None of my friends know that secretly, I'm really sad inside. I'm used to being the happy one, but I just feel like I'm stuck in a routine that won't stop, and that I'm trapped in this life, in this school. None of my friends know that I have trust issues. I've never trusted anyone completely in my life. I like to keep things to myself, to build this barricade between me and everyone else. I've never told anyone anything that was truly important to me. Maybe that's why I'm slowly starting to break down inside. I guess I'm still trying to deal with the consequences of that.

"The less you open your heart to others, the more your heart suffers."

-Deepak Chopra

Everything.

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This sounds exactly like one of those stupid YA novels, and for that I'm super apologize, but I'm in love with one of my closest friends and no one really knows it. It's kind of embarrassing. This friend isn't attractive

in the stereotypical sense. This is going to sound cocky, but looks-wise, I would even say that I am way out of their league. But it is the conversations we have on a daily basis that make me love them. They are the only person to whom I can speak without inhibition. Sometimes I feel bad for those whom I call my "best friends" because I am never myself around them. I'm only myself around this one person. That's why I love them. They don't ask anything of me. They take me the way I am, with honesty, and no second thought. They are one of the best people I know. Shout-out to you if you are reading this: you're a wonderful person and even though I wish you would regard me as deeply as I regard you, I am very grateful for our friendship. I guess the reason I keep this secret so closely to me is because it would seem so typical of me to love this person. I do care what people think of me. It sucks but I do. Also, it would damage what small reputation I have. This person is one of the only friends I have of the opposite sex, so to admit I like them would make me seem incapable of being friends with members of opposite sex. Moreover, I have been telling friends for years that I have no feelings towards them, because I didn't, until now. I just can't admit it. I hope we'll always be friends, until we are old, but if that is the case, I'll never let them know that in the electric days of our school years, I was in love with them. The secret will disappear when I do. I am too much cowardly to reveal it now.

"We are all travelers in the wilderness of this world, and the best we can find in our travels is an honest friend."

-Robert Louis Stevenson

The main reason why I'm hesitant to share which college I'm going to is because my friends know me too well. I'm afraid that they'll think I should have chosen a better college instead. Taking a step back from my assumption, I realize that it's unfair of me to think this way. If they truly are my friends, they'll be happy for me no matter where I go. My unjustified fear suggests that I'm more scared of having chosen the wrong school. It's not my friends who have set up an expectation that I've failed to meet but myself. I thought I would go somewhere exceptional instead of ordinary. Still, I don't know if I'm going to tell them my future college. I may just let them find out from someone else instead. If I can't be genuinely proud of

my choice, how can I share it?

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There are so many things that I am keeping from my friends right now. But the biggest one that I'm hiding from them is I'm going to a different school after this year. I've mentioned the idea to them before and they say that I would be missed, but I would be a horrible person for leaving them. I have to do what's best for me and then guilt tripping me is going to make it that much harder to say good bye. I wish I could just say it! Like "Hey! How are you? Yeah I'm good. OH! I'm moving to a different school! PEACE B*TCHES!" and just walk away like nothing happened. I have a lot of confidence, I wore the pants of my past relationship, I speak my mind (way too much for it to be normal), and I'm not afraid of what people might think of me, but for some reason just telling my friends this small news is just too much for me. I'm not scared of being alone at the new school, but I'm terrified of what my friends will think of me when I leave.

"True friends will always push you towards the great possibilities of your future, false friends will always chain you to the mistakes in your past."

-Seth Brown

I would never tell my friends that what they are doing is wrong. It is really silly, but although, I am strong myself and do not succumb to peer pressure, I cannot criticize them. I cannot help but thinking why they would do such a thing, but I just remain quiet. For instance, last year, my friend would always hang out with this one boy from another school, whom she started later dating. I knew he was bad news as I knew him from before, but not once did I say anything to my friend. Inside, I would think constantly that she is making wrong choices, but outside, I would giggle when she would share how he asked her out, etc. A similar thing happened again to another friend just this year. This person told me in a group setting how he/she was cheating in this one class. He/she was essentially bragging about how he/she got away with it and did not need to even study. It angered me that he/she was so brazen about this and even advocating it. I still kept quiet. I should have at least told this person

that this was wrong, but I just cannot tell my friends that they are wrong. It is not that I am afraid it will affect our friendship, because I think I am close enough that our friendships would persist. I just don't because I don't want to hurt them.

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My friends don't know that I cut. My friends don't know that I got rejected from all the schools I applied to. My friends don't know that I got a D in a class last semester. My friends don't know that I have an 1800 SAT score.

"I have feelings too. I am still human. All I want is to be loved, for myself and for my talent."

- Marilyn Monroe

I think the better question is honestly, "What Do My Friends Know About Me?" I feel as if my friends don't actually know the real me. The real me is a poetry fanatic, Bollywood movie obsessed, food hoarding, OCD person. My friends won't understand that. There are so many things I can't tell my friends and honestly fitting in is hard enough so I don't need those things to add more to the struggles. Because god knows the struggles are so damn real. I don't think I could tell anyone what I feel. I tried once, but my friend said my problems weren't real and I complain too much so that's why I stick to dealing with my own problems. Oh well.

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Sometimes I want to run away. I want to run far, and I want to run fast. I don't care where and I don't care how. I don't want to be forced into these expectations everyone has for me all of the time anymore. Do this, be that, don't forget about this. They force me to sit in my room, scared to go outside and face them. Over thinking, worrying, distracting myself, over thinking, worrying, and distracting myself time and time again. Then I look at the clock, and it's too late to get anything done, so I sleep. I wake up, dreading the day and its expectations of me, And it makes me want to run.

I am getting ready and working in my second book and this same issue called my attention. In a couple do you hide to protect some facts to preserve your individuality or do you open up completely? Talking with my husband we arrived to the conclusion that if you want to bond dearly with your significant other it is essential that you show yourself as transparent as you can. Real love is devoted to accept and forgive everything. It is a sign of greatness to show yourself vulnerable in front of the other. Vulnerability is what make us soft enough as to connect. Brene Brown in her TED talks speaks about connection, she says we are wired to connect, and connection is why we are here. I can relate the sharing of the most painful facts in life, of our shortcomings and errors to the connection of the muscle to the bone. The tendon is that skinny slice of flesh that bonds together the hard bone with the active muscle. When we are courageous enough to show our needs we open up to the other and we deposit our confidence and trust. Give it a try, its worth it!

"A person's world is only as big as their heart."

- Tanya A. Moore

I never tell my friends who I actually like. Not even friends not from Lynbrook. I just don't see any point in telling them, even in truth or dare, because it doesn't establish anything. I definitely feel bad when just opting for saying that I like someone outside of school so no more questions are asked, but if I tell the truth, there's no benefit either. Just going through the process of truth or dare is enough to build trust and bond and all that good friendship stuff. But when friends know who other friends like, there is automatically judgement toward the friend and whoever the friend liked or likes. It doesn't help anyone. And getting advice can be hard anyways, so eh.

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Honestly, I keep most of the people I know in separate spheres, trying to make sure that none of them intersect. My friends will know as much about my family as my family does about my friends, which is to say: very little. Nobody knows the full picture, and everybody knows that fact. And I find it best that way. No one really feels like they fully know me, allowing me to stay slightly separate from everyone.

I smoke weeeeeeeed(:

~ ~ ~

I never tell some of my friends about my past. I keep certain things to myself because I want to protect myself. The distance between my friends and I keeps me from telling them. I would tell my secret to someone other than my friend because I do not need to concern that much.

"Breathe. Let go. And remind yourself that this very moment is the only one you know you have for sure."

-Oprah Winfrey

I have a foot fetish, but no one knows. Not even my best friends. I'm a boy, and some of my best friends have been girls. When girls wear open toed shoes, especially with high heels, I get a boner. Some of my best friends have given me boners, but they don't even know it. Sometimes I look at some girl's pictures on Facebook and get a boner because I can see her feet.

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I've been friends with the people I hang out with for a few years, and its not that they don't know anything about me, but they don't realize or seem to acknowledge that I've changed from the person I was before. So in a sense, although my friends are very familiar with the me of the past, they don't know anything about the present me.

"True friends will always push you towards the great possibilities of your future, false friends will always chain you to the mistakes in your past."

-Seth Brown

No one outside my direct family knows that I have a terminal illness.

I have a very diverse friend group. Not in terms of ethnicity, but in terms of personality. It is also mixed gender. Something that they all don't know about me is that I'm a year younger than my grade level. I feel like if I tell them I'm younger they will all look at me differently. I chose to keep it to myself because I don't need this treatment like I'm something less from them or anyone to be honest. I wouldn't tell my secrets to anyone outside of our circle because I believe that treatment will come from everyone. Maybe when we're older, like 20's-30's I will tell them, because hopefully by then they will have grown up.

"I pay no attention whatever to anybody's praise or blame. I simply follow my own feelings."

-Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

My friends don't know that I cry about my weight everyday. My friends don't know that I once found it insulting when someone thought I was someone else because I'm skinnier than them.

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My life was terrible as a small child. My mom was a hoarder with borderline personality disorder, my dad is an angry drunk, and my older brother is a complete stoner who never bothered to do homework or even take his SAT. The reason I say my mom "was" a hoarder is because she died when I was really little. In fact, I was the person to find her cold dead body lying in her bedroom. But before she died, there was constantly yelling and things being thrown across the house, which led to my drunk dad hitting me and my brothers. My mom was put into many different psych wards and the meds she took turned her into a vicious zombie. She would sleep all day, wake up, and start fighting with my dad, only to turn around and hug us and tell us how much she loved us, and then scream maniacally again. My older brother, in his teen years at the time, escaped with drug use and was always getting into trouble. When I started to put the pieces together and realize our house wasn't normal, I fell to pieces. I'm really dying inside. And no one knows.

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Shirani M. Pathak, LCSW is a licensed psychotherapist with a private practice in San Jose, CA. One of her specialties is working with teenagers and their families around many of the challenges that arise during the adolescent years. Other specialties include women's issues (relationships, balancing roles), and mild depression/anxiety. She has a blog on her website with helpful tips and tools. For more information, visit www.spathaklcsw.com

It's Okay to Ask for Help

As human beings we believe that when we make friendships, they are bonds that we develop with people who we can trust, people who can support us through anything, and people who will be there for us regardless of what we think, say or do. Then why is it when prompted with the question, "What my friends don't know about me," responses from Lynbrook students echoed fear, judgment, failed expectations, sadness/depression, and isolation?

Could it be that Lynbrook students differ from teenagers at other schools? Maybe. Could it be that Lynbrook students are right where they are supposed to be developmentally? Yes, that's more likely.

When asked about why it is that the themes identified in the student submissions are primarily focused on fear, judgment, failed expectations, sadness/depression, and isolation, the students responded with: We don't want to burden our friends.

What? Burden our friends? What does that mean?

So I asked them to clarify. Students went on to say that they feel as though their friends are dealing with the same or similar pressures and they don't want to add their struggles on to another person, thereby burdening them. They acknowledged that this tends to lead towards feelings of sadness and isolation, especially because they feel they can't talk to their parents about what's going on due to feeling like their parents trivialize their problems.

Then where is a teenager to turn? Apparently, they are turning to themselves and keeping many important things inside. A few students expressed feeling as though their "problems aren't big enough" and this idea that they should be able to handle their problems themselves.

The reality is: developmentally, teenagers are not equipped to handle their social and emotional struggles on their own.

Teenagers are incredibly intelligent, but research shows that developmentally, they lack maturation in the part of the brain that handles higher level functioning. This higher level functioning includes reasoning, planning, and judgment. With a developmental lack in reasoning, planning, and judgment, it can be very challenging for even the most intellectually adept teen to be able to successfully manage social and emotional problems.

Adolescence is the time for youth to learn how to problem solve and how to work through things, but if they aren't equipped with the proper skills and tools purely due to normal adolescent brain development, how are they expected to do that on their own? Not only how are they expected to do it, but how are they expected to do it in a healthy, productive manner?

They could turn to their friends, but as we learned through the submissions, teens are not turning to their friends out of fear and shame, which leads to sadness, depression, and feelings of isolation. Not to mention, that their other teenage friends are experiencing the same lack of brain maturation in the areas of reasoning, planning, and judgment. So who should they turn to?

A trusted adult or a professional.

Many of you may be thinking, "What, why would I turn to a professional? I'm not crazy, why would I need professional help?" Or "There's nothing wrong with my child, why would he or she need professional help?"

The truth of the matter is: Everyone could use professional help because coun-

selling is for normal people. People just like you and me. We turn to professionals because professionals have experience and expertise in something we don't.

As teens we try the best we can to manage the things that are going on for us in our lives. As parents we try the best we can to balance our roles inside the home with our children and families and outside the home in the work world. But sometimes, we need help with how to be our best or do our best, and even more so when we are feeling like there are issues or concerns that are too difficult for us to share with our friends.

When I asked the students what stops them from getting help, they said: social stigma; feeling like my problems aren't big enough and that I should be able to get through it myself; it's difficult to find someone who understands; not wanting to burden others; feeling like things will get worse; the expectation that I can do things on my own; it's a sign of weakness; feeling like my problems aren't as big as someone else's; it's hard to know when you need help; and, if my parents don't care about my problems, my friends probably don't either.

Wow.

I am here to tell you: If there is something you are struggling with internally, please please please, reach out to a trusted person and ask for help! Asking for help is a normal part of life and supports your learning and development as a healthy individual. This support not only helps you now, but it also lays down a solid foundation for your future healthy self.

I also wanted to comment on abuse, as a number of the submissions spoke about child abuse and maltreatment. Abuse and maltreatment are never okay. If you or someone you know are being harmed by an adult, please share this information with a trusted adult or school official. Child Abuse Reporting Laws exist to help and protect children and families, not to harm them further. Many families don't even know that the methods of discipline they are using are harmful and unsafe, just as was stated in one of the submissions. By making a report, it simply allows families an opportunity to learn new, safe behaviors. Please note, that emotional abuse/maltreatment, is just as real as physical abuse/maltreatment.

So, what are you waiting for? If there is something going on with you, REACH OUT!

For students, parents and school staff:

You, or a teen you know, may need help if any combination of the following symptoms are observed in the teen consistently over the period of 2 weeks or more (*Please note, any engagement in self-harm behavior or expression of suicidal thoughts requires immediate attention. These items are marked with an *):

- Teen is withdrawn from either family or friends
- Teen feels isolated
- Teen feels like nobody understands what they are going through
- Teen is experiencing a change in sleep or appetite
- Teen is more irritable than usual
- Teen is feeling overwhelmed by day to day pressures
- Teen's grades start falling or teen is struggling and needs to work harder to maintain grades
- Teen is less interested in activities that were once fun
- Teen is experiencing thoughts about wishing they were dead or thinking they would be better off dead*
- Teen has said to people that they have a plan to kill themselves*
- Teen is engaging in cutting, burning, hitting, or any other self-harm behavior*

Tools for Teens and Parents

"The Teen Brain: Still Under Construction" by National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-teen-brain-still-under-construction/index.shtml>

"The Teen Brain" by Debra Bradley Ruder Harvard Magazine <http://harvardmagazine.com/2008/09/the-teen-brain.html>

"Tips for Parents on Building Healthy Relationships with their Teenagers" From Dr. David Wolfe, RBC Investments Chair in Children's Mental Health & Developmental Psychology http://knowledge.camh.net/amh-specialists/resources_families/Pages/tips_for_parents_teens.aspx

Additional Resources

Crisis Hotlines: For those times when you feel like you need someone to talk to but don't know who, or if you are thinking about hurting yourself or another. All of these hotlines are open 24/7.

EMQ Families First Mobile Crisis Line for Children and Adolescents: 408-379-9085 or 1-877-41-CRISIS. Santa Clara County 24-hour Suicide & Crisis Hotline: 1-855-278-4204 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

Child Abuse Reporting: Because child abuse/maltreatment is never okay.

For Crime in Action, please call 9-1-1.

To report suspected child abuse, call Santa Clara County Child Abuse Hotline: 408-299-2071

Other Important Phone Numbers: <http://www.pamf.org/teen/TeenHotlineHelplinebroch.pdf>

For Students:

-Regardless of what you are going through, REACH OUT! Reach out to a friend, reach out to a teacher, reach out to school staff, reach out to a pastor, reach out to a parent, reach out to a counselor, reach out to a crisis line. It doesn't matter who it is, just reach out to a trusted someone!

-Know that it is okay to talk about whatever is going on for you right now.

-Don't hold back from reaching out because you feel like you are going to be judged by others. Just find safe people to reach out to.

-Remember that just because others are going through something, you still have a right to talk about what you are going through as well.

-Lynbrook staff truly care about what's going on with their students, so please know that you can go to them.

-Counseling is for normal people. Participating in counseling doesn't make you crazy or abnormal.

-If an adult is engaging in harmful behavior towards you or someone you know, please share this information with school officials, the child abuse hotline, or 9-1-1 for abuse in action.

For Parents:

-When your child approaches you for anything, try to set aside what is going on with you and focus your full attention to your child's needs.

-Try to maintain a non-judgmental attitude with your child. If you do this, they are more likely to seek you out when they need help.

-Recognize that although your life as an adult is hard, in this day and age, your teenager's life is equally challenging, but in a different way. This allows compassion to develop and leads to strengthening the relationship between you and your teenager.

-Understand and accept that seeking professional help, such as counseling, is okay. Once you understand and accept that, be sure to share that message with your child.

-If you are having a difficult time managing your expectations for your child, understand that counseling might be right for you, too.

-If you or your partner use physical discipline or emotional manipulation with your child, please please please, stop and seek professional help for yourself.