



New York State

PRESS RELEASE

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NAMI-NYS Responds to the Cover of the March 8 Edition of the New York Post and the Article “How to Tell if Your Child is a Future Psychopath”

The National Alliance on Mental Illness-New York State (NAMI-NYS) is the state chapter of NAMI, the nation’s largest grassroots organization working to improve the lives of individuals and families impacted by mental illness. We represent the one in four families in New York State whose lives have been affected by neurobiological brain disorders. NAMI-NYS has severe concerns regarding the graphic on the cover of your March 8th edition which states “when your child is psycho,” and the article that corresponds with it. This representation is not only offensive by invoking an archaic and stigmatizing term, it will further alienate families who suspect their child may have a mental illness, increase fear among the general public and ultimately lead to people not getting the support they need to recover.

We understand that recent events have once again thrust the conversation about mental illness into the forefront, but while it is important that we have the conversation, it must be conducted correctly and in a manner that is generated to help people.

NAMI-NYS is deeply saddened by the tragedy which took place at Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. As an organization founded by parents advocating to better the lives of their children, our hearts are with the many families impacted by this tragedy. Unfortunately, our grief is also mixed with frustration as once again a mass shooting is followed by splashy headlines and reporting designed to create a scapegoat for unthinkable tragedies. The reality is that the individuals and families we represent want no part of this narrative. Our hearts are equally as broken to see that our families once again find ourselves caught in the glare of a stigmatizing spotlight.

The article by Jane Ridley entitled “how to tell if your child is a future psychopath,” is both offensive and irresponsible journalism. The article advances an untrue scare tactic that if you think your child has a mental illness you better intervene before they hurt you or others. This puts fear in both families and the public at large. This rhetorical path will lead teachers and students to being reluctant to approach a student who may desperately need help.

NAMI-NYS and our affiliates work every day to provide families and schools with the tools to recognize potential mental illness and just as importantly what to do if they do believe a child has symptoms. We do this not to prevent the rare tragedy such as what happened in Parkland, but to get a young person who may have a psychiatric disorder the help they need as quickly as possible. Early-intervention is the most effective way to treat neurobiological disorders and have the highest positive recovery outcomes.

Providing parents, teachers and students with the tools to recognize mental illness and how to properly intervene will prevent the tragedies we have seen too many of our loved ones experience which include, inability to finish school, unemployment, homelessness, entry into the criminal justice system, substance abuse and suicide. We believe that articles designed to inform parents about possible mental illness, should also mention the importance of early-intervention initiatives such as New York State's innovative OnTrackNY program. Ms. Ridley's article outlines a problem without providing strategies of what to do if you believe your child may have a severe mental illness. It is irresponsible to scare people without mentioning a possible solution. New York City has two of the world's leading psychiatric institutions in the New York State Psychiatric Institute and the Nathan Kline Institute, the article failed to speak with the prominent doctors associated with these facilities or the life changing and saving programs they offer.

Nowhere in the article does it state that people with a mental illness and neurobiological disorders are not inherently violent or prone to use guns. It fails to recognize that only 4% of gun incidents involve people with neurobiological disorders or that people receiving psychiatric treatment are more likely to be the victim of a crime than a perpetrator of one. Truthfully, we do have families that have had the types of experiences detailed in the article. This is because the key point of nonviolence among those with mental illness is that it applies to people receiving treatment. Unfortunately, too many people in New York State with psychiatric disorders are not receiving the appropriate treatment to advance their recovery as the ability to access treatment is far more difficult than it should be. The inability to access appropriate mental health services is one of the biggest social justice issues of our time and one that more media outlets should focus on.

There are many factors to the creating barriers to treatment including: lack of insurance parity, not enough psychiatric providers and a mental health housing system that has been flat-funded for more than twenty-five years; however stigma also plays a role in people not getting treatment. The stigma generated by articles such as Ms. Ridley's and front cover headlines such as the one on March 8th, only lead to people not seeking help because they do not want to be labeled as a "psycho" and others reluctant to help people as they fear the person may harm them. This must stop.

Our families are desperate to have their stories told in the hope it will introduce a positive change and increase treatment availability. It is painfully clear more needs to be done to increase mental health services; however NAMI-NYS does not believe that mass shootings should be the conduit to engage in this crucial conversation and discussing it in a manner that only promotes fear and a sense of helplessness will certainly hurt more than it helps.