

Amber's Story of Resilience

- **Introduction:** My name is Amber and I'm 19 years old. I'm a very outgoing and outspoken person. I work and go to school so my schedule is pretty full. My family consists of my Mom, my younger sister and my older brother. We have 6 pet rats (hairless, blue rats), and 5 dogs. My family is pretty much honest with each other – we kind of tell each other things that are the way it is, even if you don't want to hear it. I work with special needs youth every week and really enjoy that – I like knowing that I can have a positive impact on their lives.
- **My Journey:** On my journey, living with autism and bipolar in my family is quite a challenge. The biggest change that this has had on my life is that it helps me understand things from others' perspectives, and it's made me want to help others that have mental illness.
- **Educate:** I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in 2001, and it was really weird. One day I'd be really down, and a few hours later, I'd be fine. I used to fight a lot because I was on super high alert all the time, and people would say or do stuff that agitated me. Eventually I got kicked out of school and went to an alternative school, and got started on some medication. The medication really helped to calm me down. I learned a lot about getting along with others while I was there, and even learned to be a peer mediator.

It would be great if other people could understand that this (behavior) is caused by a real illness- it's not just the person acting out because they want to. Other people's attitudes hurt sometimes, but I know that it's just that, an attitude, and not necessarily the truth.

- **Resilience:** I think I'm resilient because I can see the opportunities in front of me, and if I mess up on one of them, I still have a choice and a chance to make things different the next time. One of my strengths is helping others who struggle, and appreciating their struggle while moving them forward. I also am very good at seeing things from both sides – from other people's perspective and this helps give me an outlook that others don't always have or can't see. I describe myself as being like a rubber band – I can stretch so far before I break, and I can feel when I'm about to break, so I remove myself from that situation before I do!
- **Barriers to my resiliency:** Certain people who know how to push my buttons can hamper my ability to be resilient. Keeping a positive, open mindset helps me be resilient, but others who are judgmental and negative make keeping an open mind difficult. My PTSD can interfere with my resiliency sometimes – if I get really down and start to believe the worst in every situation, that makes it really tough – like I don't want to get out of bed or do anything, and it effects everyone around me.
- **My advice to others:** Try to keep an open mind – it's all in the way you perceive things. If they need help, I can help them by taking them to their appointments, helping them get the information they need, a lot of the stuff that my mom does as an advocate for others with mental illness.

Try to get out of the house – even if you don't feel like going out – to keep yourself connected to your friends and family. Everybody needs at least one person they can talk to about anything - find that person and take advantage of the opportunity!

- **What others can do to help:** Try not to judge kids with mental health disorders. Keep looking for a way to connect with them, to understand their illness, and DON'T GIVE UP ON THEM!
- There needs to be someplace where kids can go and hang out and feel accepted. Give them their own space, especially when they're upset...give them time to think things through and to act plan fully instead of just reacting in the heat of the moment.
- **One person in the school system that really meant a lot to me was a teacher who never gave up on any of the kids in the school – no matter what they did. I respect him because of this, and because he's not there for the money, he's there just because he wants to help kids!