

Matthew's Story

Mental Health Challenges: They didn't kick in until I was in my senior year at Maryland School for the Blind because of my anxiety over leaving school. I was on a medication and that brought out something my parents had never seen...threatening to hurt them and myself. My mom knew something was going on. I had been seeing a clinical social worker for some anxiety triggered by additional drugs and that's how we got into Sheppard Pratt. I was in there twice. The first time they tried to modify the drugs and that made the situation worse and the second time they didn't want to send me home because they couldn't guarantee my parents' safety.

What do you want people to know about autism and mental health: Professionals, parents, self-advocates, educators need to try to work better together. Luckily, because my parents spoke to the school, they were able to have the school work with the doctors. My school agreed to take me back. If you are in a system like I am, you could be in a situation where you are in the hospital but, when you get out, they can refuse to take you back. These systems are very different and they need to collaborate together.

What would you tell parents: Just stick it out. Every night my mom and dad had to make the drive from Columbia to the hospital. If it was stressing them out, they didn't say anything to me and they prayed a lot. It might be a good idea to have an action plan prior to a crisis.

What would you tell other self-advocates: I would say don't wait until you are in crisis because then it's too late. For me in my experience, we didn't know it was going to happen and my parents had to think very fast what they were going to do. Get help! Don't be afraid to reach out to friends, families, professionals and others who can help.