

# Words Can Work®

Discussion Guide

Depression  
True Stories

BLAKEWORKS®

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# Note From the Author

For years, we've produced evidence-based DVDs and *Words Can Work* booklets about the challenges young people face growing up. Our goal is to help young people, parents, and other caregivers discuss important topics—from substance abuse to sexual health. When families can talk openly, kids tend to grow up more safely.

Many parents and professionals have asked us to make depression a topic of our educational materials. I hesitated for a long time. Like many families, mine has been touched by mental illness, and I wondered whether working on the project would strike too close to home.

My mother suffered from bipolar disorder. When she was depressed, even close relatives told her to just “snap out of it.” But you can't “snap out of” depression, no matter how much you want to. The symptoms of depression are a result of a change in the neurochemistry of the brain.

What does help those who suffer with mental illness is professional intervention, understanding, support, and acceptance.

After a lot of thought, I felt that we *had* to produce this program and write the *Words Can Work* booklet. In each one, insightful and courageous young adults, and their friends and families, tell their stories. Leading mental health professionals generously share their experience.

We hope that through our efforts, the stigma often associated with mental illness will be lessened; the signs of depression and other mental health disorders will be recognized earlier; people will get the treatment they need; and lives will be transformed and saved.



# Showing *Depression: True Stories*

*Depression: True Stories* is appropriate viewing for groups of young people, young adults, and parents and other caregivers. It can be used with groups in schools, the workplace, and community workshops. It's also appropriate for family viewing and discussion at home.

You can view the program in its entirety or in segments. Separate discussion questions follow each story for young people and for parents and other caregivers. The questions are also offered at the end of the program.

**The content of *Depression: True Stories* is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to replace professional advice. For specific issues, please consult a medical or health professional.**

*Note: Depression: True Stories includes copyrighted materials. Broadcast, cablecast, duplication, Internet, and Intranet or commercial use in trainings or presentations is prohibited. For further information contact Blake Works at 978.282.1663 or [info@wordscanwork.com](mailto:info@wordscanwork.com).*

## **wordscanwork.com**

At [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com), order *Words Can Work* booklets and DVDs. These resources help adolescents, young adults, parents, and other caregivers discuss important topics—from substance abuse to sexual health. Read Jeanne Blake's blog and *Issues and Answers* columns. You can schedule Jeanne Blake for dynamic, multi-media presentations and keynote speeches about the challenges young people face growing up and how to help them make healthier choices.

# Profiles

## Chamique Holdsclaw

Chamique Holdsclaw is one of the most talented players in women's professional basketball. Her fans call her the female Michael Jordan. After her grandmother's death, she became deeply depressed. She describes her depression and the treatment that helped her regain her health.

## Mike Haas

Mike lived for years with depression. Neither he nor his family knew he was depressed. He describes the physical and emotional pain of depression and how treatment saved his life.

## Angie Vasquez

Angie was so depressed that she began to cut herself. She describes how individual, family, and group therapy taught her the skills to manage her emotions in healthy ways.

## Jeanne Blake

Jeanne Blake is the host and producer of *Depression: True Stories*. She is president of Blake Works Inc. and the founder of *Words Can Work*®. Blake is a medical reporter, author, and affiliated faculty member of the Division on Addictions, Cambridge Health Alliance, Harvard Medical School.

# Using This Guide

This guide is designed to help you lead discussions with groups of young people, parents, and other caregivers. Parents can use this guide to begin discussions about the stories in the program. Questions are marked for:



young people



parents/caregivers

- Follow these arrows to proceed through the discussion.

## Impact on Participants

Viewers may feel a variety of emotions, as they watch the program, due to their own or someone else's depression or mental health disorder. We suggest providing viewers with a list of resources within their community, including counselors and other health professionals, and mental health organizations.

## Before Viewing the Program

Prepare participants for viewing the program by asking the following questions:

### ➤ Ask participants

- Do you know anyone who's experienced depression?
- What are some symptoms of depression?
- Why do many people with depression hesitate to ask for help?
- Do you think someone can be successfully treated for depression?
- The symptoms of depression reflect a change in the neurochemistry of the brain. People suffering from depression aren't weak or lazy. They're suffering from a serious but treatable illness. Why do some people still think that depression is something people can just "snap out of?"

# Chamique Holdsclaw



## ➤ Introduction

This is a program about people living with depression—a serious illness that affects children, adolescents, and adults. It affects people from all walks of life. Let's watch Chamique's story.

View Chamique's story

Approximate time 13:00

## ➤ Begin discussion for young people by saying

Let's talk about how Chamique dealt with her depression and how she got well.

## ➤ Ask young people

- Depression hurts. It affects you physically and emotionally. What are some symptoms of depression in children and adolescents?

*Answer: Irritability and anger. Children and adolescents can have a difficult time explaining why they're upset. When they don't feel understood, they may become angry and irritable.*

- What are some symptoms of depression in adults?

*Answer: Feeling sad and hopeless; having a hard time focusing and solving problems; not feeling motivated or interested in activities; feeling tired; and feeling bad about yourself.*

- What's the difference between normal feelings of sadness and depression?

*Answer: Depression lasts longer—at least 2 weeks—and can affect all the parts of your life including the way you think, feel, and behave.*

- As a young girl, Chamique learned it's important to deal with problems and not let them build up. Why is this important?

- Why do you think some of Chamique's friends had a hard time understanding that she could be depressed?

- Why was it important that Chamique sought professional help?

- If you're taking anti-depressant medication and want to stop, why must you talk with your doctor first?

*Answer: When someone who's depressed begins to feel the effect of an anti-depressant medication, they might think they no longer need it. No one can know the best time to stop using anti-depressant medication. This is a decision that must be made with a doctor's guidance.*

- Depression can come back. How does Chamique lessen the chances she'll experience depression again?

### ➤ **Remind young people**

Many people with depression don't get treatment. Some don't know they have the illness. Others worry about what people will think. Chamique reminds us that asking for help is a sign of strength.





## ➤ Introduction

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View Chamique's story

Approximate time 13:00

## ➤ Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying

Let's talk about how Chamique dealt with her depression and how she got well.

## ➤ Ask parents and caregivers

- Depression hurts you in many ways—how you think and feel. What signs of depression did Chamique show as a young girl?

*Answer: Irritability and anger. Children and adolescents can have a difficult time explaining why they're upset. When they don't feel understood, they may become angry and irritable.*

- What are some symptoms of depression in adults?

*Answer: Persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness; loss of motivation and interest in activities; inability to concentrate; fatigue and feelings of low self-worth.*

Source: National Institute of Mental Health

- If your child showed signs of emotional distress, what would you do?
- Why is it important to seek professional help if your child or you are experiencing depression or other mood disturbances?
- Chamique learned to deal with problems, rather than let them build up. Why is this important for people of any age to do?
- How can you encourage your children to share their worries so they don't build up?
- When Chamique was well enough, she stopped taking anti-depressant medication. Why must this only be done with a doctor's supervision?

*Answer: When someone who's depressed begins to feel the effect of an anti-depressant medication, they might think they no longer need it. No one can know the best time to stop using anti-depressant medication. This is a decision that must be made with a doctor's guidance.*

Source: Dr. Jefferson Prince, *Words Can Work: When Talking About Depression and Other Mental Health Disorders*

### ➤ **Remind parents or caregivers**

Research shows that some depressed people, when they take antidepressant medication, develop significant side effects, including feeling suicidal. This happens rarely, but it underscores the importance of staying in close contact with your doctor.

### **wordscanwork.com**

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# Mike Haas



## ➤ Introduction

Often, people with depression don't know they have it. Knowing the signs of depression can help those who need treatment for the illness get it. Let's watch Mike's story.

[View Mike's story](#)

Approximate time 9:45

## ➤ Begin discussion for young people by saying

Mike says he's glad he asked for help with his depression. Now he enjoys life.

## ➤ Ask young people

- If a friend told you he felt miserable and his parents didn't understand, to whom would you suggest he turned to for support?
- Mike told a counselor he had suicidal thoughts. Why was it important that he told someone he trusts?
- If a friend mentioned that he or she had thoughts of suicide, what would you do?
- Depression distorts thinking. Why is Mike glad he asked for help?
- Why do you think Mike felt relieved when he went to the hospital for the first time?
- When Mike began to cut himself, why did he ask to go back to the hospital?

*Answer: He knew he needed professional help. Self-injury is always a sign of deep distress and must always be assessed by a professional.*

- What did Mike learn when he went back to the hospital?
- How did getting treatment for his depression change Mike's life?

## ➤ Remind young people

People suffering from depression aren't weak or lazy. They're suffering from a serious but treatable illness.



## ➤ Introduction

Often people with depression don't know they have it. Let's watch Mike's story.

[View Mike's story](#)

Approximate time 9:45

## ➤ Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying

The earlier depression is identified, the sooner the person suffering with the illness can be treated. That's why it's important to know the signs of depression.

## ➤ Ask parents or caregivers

- When Mike was a young boy, he showed signs of depression. What were they?

*Answer: He was irritable and angry, fighting with peers, and later had trouble doing his schoolwork.*

- How can parents distinguish whether a child is going through a typical phase of adolescence, or needs professional help?
- Mike's mom denied that he might be depressed. What happened as a result of her denial?
- How can you help your children balance the many pressures they feel growing up?
- If your child mentioned suicide, what would you do?
- Mike's parents didn't know he was cutting himself. How would you know if your child was engaging in self-injury?
- Depression distorts thinking. How did treatment change Mike's life?
- Family therapy taught Mike's family to talk openly and listen. How does effective communication help everyone in the family stay healthy?

## ➤ Remind parents or caregivers

People suffering from depression aren't weak or lazy. They're suffering from a serious but treatable illness.

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# Angie Vasquez



## ➤ Introduction

There are different ways to treat depression. Let's watch Angie's story.

[View Angie's story](#)

Approximate time 2:00

## ➤ Begin discussion for young people by saying

Angie was open to therapy and works hard to stay well.

## ➤ Ask young people

- Soon after Angie began seeing a therapist, she felt better. What did she like about therapy?
- List some of the skills Angie learned in therapy.
- What does Angie enjoy about group therapy?
- Since going to family therapy, how do Angie and her sister Cynthia communicate differently with each other?
- Why is it dangerous to use alcohol, illegal drugs, or prescription drugs prescribed for someone else, to try to cope?
- If someone said seeking help from a mental health professional was a sign of weakness, how would you respond?
- What have you learned about depression that you didn't know before seeing these stories?

## ➤ Remind young people

Angie encourages anyone suffering with depression to ask for help. Through therapy, you can learn to manage stress and negative feelings



## ➤ Introduction

There are different ways to treat depression. Let's watch Angie's story.

View Angie's story

Approximate time 2:00

## ➤ Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying

Angie was open to therapy and it changed her life.

## ➤ Ask parents or caregivers

- Why do you think Angie felt better shortly after she began seeing a therapist?
- Angie felt a connection with her therapist. How can you give your child this sense of connection with you?
- How did family therapy improve Angie's relationship with her sister?
- Why is it dangerous to use alcohol, illegal drugs, or prescription drugs prescribed for someone else, to try to cope?
- If you learned that your child was drinking alcohol or using other drugs, how would you respond?
- If someone said seeking help from a mental health professional was a sign of weakness, how would you respond?
- What have you learned about depression that you didn't know before seeing these stories?

## ➤ Remind parents or caregivers

Angie encourages anyone suffering with depression to ask for help. Through therapy, you can learn to manage stress and negative feelings.

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*Issues and Answers* columns. You can schedule Jeanne Blake for dynamic, multi-media presentations and keynote speeches about the challenges young people face growing up and how to help them make healthier choices.



# Correspondence

We recommend that as part of a classroom or group project adolescents and young adults write to Chamique, Mike or Angie.

Send correspondence to:

Blake Works Inc.  
PO Box 1402  
Gloucester, MA 01930

or email: [info@wordscanwork.com](mailto:info@wordscanwork.com)

All correspondence will be screened.

## Blake Works Inc.

Blake Works Inc. produces evidence-based media (DVDs, the *Words Can Work* series of booklets, discussion guides, training materials, and [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com)) to help adolescents, young adults, and families talk about the challenges kids face growing up. Blake Works Inc. is certified as a Woman Owned Business.

Jeanne Blake is president of Blake Works and the founder of *Words Can Work*®. She is a television medical reporter and an affiliated faculty member at the Division on Addictions, Cambridge Health Alliance, Harvard Medical School.

Blake speaks to parents and other caregivers at corporations and at health care and community organizations, and consults nationally on family communication. She is president of Family Health Productions.

## DVDs with discussion guides *Words Can Work* booklets available from [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com)

### **Alcohol: True Stories Hosted by Matt Damon** (20 minutes)

Young people's stories about drinking and driving, addiction, and avoiding alcohol use. *For grades 5-12, parents, and other caregivers.*

### **Boys on Bullying** (20 minutes)

Boys tell how they dealt with bullying through support from friends, parents, or other caring adults. *For grades 5-12, parents, and other caregivers.*

### **Depression: True Stories** (26 minutes)

Depression is a treatable, not shameful, illness. Professional basketball player Chamique Holdsclaw and other young adults describe living with—and recovering from—depression. Their powerful stories show how early diagnosis and treatment can transform and save lives. *For grades 6-college, parents and other caregivers.*

### **Drugs: True Stories** (28 minutes)

Abuse of alcohol and marijuana led Joel to prescription painkillers. Joel and his family describe addiction, denial, and recovery. Trevor finds support to avoid drug use. H. Westley Clark, M.D., SAMHSA, and Howard Shaffer, Ph.D., Harvard Medical School, answer FAQ. *For grades 5-college, parents, and other caregivers.*

### **In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS** (20 minutes)

Teens infected with HIV through unprotected intercourse discuss denial, condoms, postponing sex, and how alcohol affects decision-making. *For grades 5-12, parents, and other caregivers.*

### **The Power of Girls: Inside and Out** (20 minutes)

Girls tell how friends, parents, or other caregivers helped them handle bullying, eating disorders, early sexual activity, and deep loss. *For grades 5-12, parents, and other caregivers.*

### **Raising Healthy Kids: Families Talk About Sexual Health** (20-minute DVDs)

Communication about sexual health begins at birth. Parents and young people tell how they discuss sexual health. Experts offer insight to help families start and continue conversations. For parents and other caregivers.

Program #1 For Parents of Young Children

Program #2 For Parents of Preadolescents and Adolescents

### **Steroids: True Stories Hosted by Curt Schilling** (20 minutes)

Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling tells about Craig's anabolic steroid abuse. Craig, his parents and sister describe their five-year "nightmare." Nate, 18, builds strength naturally. Roberto Olivardia, Ph.D., Harvard Medical School, answers FAQ. *For grades 6-college, parents, and other caregivers. A portion of the proceeds is donated to Curt's Pitch for ALS.*

## **Words Can Work booklets by Jeanne Blake reinforce key messages.**

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking About Alcohol*** (48 pages)

Young people and parents tell how they discuss underage drinking. Experts offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about alcohol use.

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking About Depression and Other Mental Health Disorders*** (52 pages)

Young adults and their families discuss living with depression, bipolar disorder, and other mental health disorders. Experts offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about these topics.

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking About Drugs*** (56 pages)

Young people and parents tell their stories about drug use and abuse, addiction, recovery, and the benefits of staying drug-free. Brian Johnson, M.D., Harvard Medical School, and Jeanne Blake offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about drugs.

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking About Healthy Weight*** (available Winter 2008)

Young people and parents discuss achieving and maintaining healthy weight, eating disorders and nurturing a positive body image. Experts offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about these topics.

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking With Kids About Sexual Health*** (115 pages)

Young people and parents discuss puberty, values, relationships, postponing sex, and birth control. Experts, including former Surgeon General David Satcher, M.D., offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about these topics.

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking About Steroids*** (52 pages)

Young people and parents discuss anabolic steroids and the benefits of building strength naturally. Experts offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about anabolic steroids.

**Classroom activities/discussion points for *Words Can Work* booklets can be downloaded from [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com).**

**Order at [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com)**

Quantity discounts available

[info@wordscanwork.com](mailto:info@wordscanwork.com)

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## Author

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## Research

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## Editor

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## Advisors

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Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences  
Director, Child and Adolescent Externship Training  
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Richard Falzone, M.D.  
McLean Hospital  
Instructor in Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

Madelyn S. Gould, Ph.D., M.P.H.  
Professor, Psychiatry and Public Health (Epidemiology)  
Columbia University/New York State Psychiatric Institute

John D. Hogan

Jane L. Pearson, Ph.D.  
Chair, NIMH Suicide Research Consortium  
National Institute of Mental Health

Jefferson Prince, M.D.  
Child Psychiatry and Pediatric Psychopharmacology Clinics  
Massachusetts General Hospital  
Instructor in Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School  
Director of Child Psychiatry, North Shore Medical Center

Paula K. Rauch, M.D.  
Director, Child Psychiatry Consultation Service to Pediatrics  
Director, Marjorie E. Korff PACT Program: Parenting At a Challenging Time  
Massachusetts General Hospital  
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

Janet Wozniak, M.D.  
Director, Pediatric Bipolar Disorder Research Program  
Massachusetts General Hospital  
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

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