

You Are NOT Alone



When Hannah felt sad and hopeless, she wasn't sure how to ask for help. Now she and her brother have created an app that makes it easier to reach out for support. BY JESSICA PRESS

For the first 14 years of her life, Hannah Lucas was full of energy. She was a gymnast who spent up to 30 hours per week in the gym. She loved shopping and hanging out with friends. At home, you could find her goofing off with her younger brother, Charlie.

Hannah was almost always happy.

But just two weeks after she started high school, her world took a sharp turn.

Hannah didn't feel well—ever. “The second week of school, I started passing out,” she explains. “It was terrifying.”

Doctors did tests to try to figure out why she kept fainting. At the same time, Hannah also started having deep, dark feelings she couldn't shake. She constantly felt scared and helpless. Worst of all, she felt alone. Most nights, she hid away in her room.

“I tried to tune out my feelings by watching Netflix and reading,” says Hannah, now 17. “But as soon as a show ended or I finished a book, all of my scary feelings would come rushing over me.”

Lowest Point

Hannah didn't feel like herself for months. Often, she felt numb and empty. Then one night in March, she reached her lowest point. “I was lying in my bedroom feeling completely hopeless,” she says. Hannah worried that she might hurt herself. She wanted to reach out to her family for help, but didn't know how.

VOCABULARY

therapist: a person who helps people deal with emotional problems by talking about them

depression: a serious medical condition in which a person feels very sad and hopeless

anxiety: a serious medical condition that causes people to feel extreme fear or worry

triggered: caused something to happen

coding: instructions that tell a computer what to do

ONLINE EXTRA

Watch a video to get to know Hannah!

PRESS FOR HELP

Hannah and Charlie created an app for teens who are feeling sad, stressed, or lonely.

"I had written long texts to my mom, but always felt too shy to send them," she says.

Luckily, Hannah's mom came to her room to check on her. When she did, Hannah spilled out her feelings through tears. Her mom held her, comforting her and watching over her.

After that night, Hannah's doctor suggested she see a **therapist** to talk about her feelings. That's how she found out she has **depression** and **anxiety**. These serious but common and treatable medical conditions affect millions of teens.

Hannah's depression

and anxiety weren't what caused her to faint. But these conditions can run in families and are often **triggered** by a big life event. For Hannah, that event was likely her new health problems.

Turning Point

That night in March was the worst Hannah ever felt. But that night also gave her a great idea. She would create an app that would make it easier for sad or anxious teens to ask for help.

And Hannah knew exactly who to ask to make it happen: her brother, Charlie.

From the time Charlie was seven years old, he had been teaching himself computer **coding**. When Hannah told him her idea, he immediately got started.

"I couldn't catch Hannah when she was fainting," says Charlie, 15. "And I didn't know how to help her with her depression. But when she asked me to help with her app, I knew exactly what to do. I was so happy to be able to support her."

Charlie and Hannah worked hard to create their app. It's called notOK App, and it's available for free. More than 70,000 people around the country

have downloaded it.

The way it works is simple. You enter the contact information for up to five people you trust. Then, if you ever feel lonely or need support, you press a button in the app. Pressing that button alerts all five contacts, who can show up to help.

Staying Strong

Doctors finally found out why Hannah was fainting. After they gave her the right medicine, the problem went away. But she still struggles with depression and anxiety. The difference now is that she has support. She sees her therapist regularly. She also talks to her family about her feelings.

Most days Hannah feels happy. She enjoys being with her friends, writing, and going to the gym. She's found that exercise helps calm her mind.

And she knows that if she ever needs help, she can instantly get it. All she has to do is press a button inside an app—an app that she and her brother created. •

IF YOU ARE HAVING AN EMOTIONAL EMERGENCY:

Don't wait. Contact the Crisis Text Line by texting the word HOME to 741741. A counselor will help you find the help you need—24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

COURTESY OF LUCAS FAMILY

ACTION ACTIVITY

You've just read "You Are Not Alone." Now it's time to do this activity.

GO FURTHER! FIND ACTIVITIES ONLINE

WHAT TO DO: In this story, Hannah sees a **problem** and comes up with a **solution** to that problem.

In the chart below, fill in the blanks. First, identify the solution. Then, write in the details from the story that help you understand the problem and solution.

HAPPY HANNAH

Her family's dog, Trooper, always makes her smile.



The Problem: Hannah had a hard time asking for help when she was struggling with depression and anxiety.

Detail 1:

Hannah felt sad, scared, helpless, and alone.

Detail 2:

Hint: What happened to Hannah one night in March?

Detail 3:

Hint: What did Hannah feel too shy to do?

The Solution:

Detail 1:

Hannah's brother knows computer coding, so he helped her make the app.

Detail 2:

Hint: What is the app called, and how much does it cost?

Detail 3:

Hint: How does the app work?

JOHN AMIS/AP IMAGES

Answers are in the Teacher's Guide.



WORKING HARD Charlie was excited to use his computer skills to help his sister.