

Emma's Story

Emma is the 16-year-old daughter of Isabella and Carol, who live in Madison, Wisconsin. Isabella is on the faculty at the university, and Carol is a software developer. Emma is their only child.

Emma was a bright child, and Isabella and Carol had few concerns until Emma began to pass through puberty. During this time, Emma began to isolate herself from others and engage in self-harm behavior. Emma first attempted suicide at age 13. Since then, Emma has been hospitalized six times for suicidal attempts and gestures, and remains in the 99th percentile for suicide risk.

At age 13, Emma was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Ever since then, she has been seen by a psychotherapist and a psychiatrist and has been prescribed psychiatric medications. While her behaviors did appear to improve at first, Isabella and Carol worry that their daughter's suicidality and self-harm are beginning to intensify. Emma was diagnosed with a personality disorder last year.

Emma reports daily auditory and visual hallucinations and has threatened to kill her parents. She has not acted upon these threats, though she is often verbally intimidating toward them. She engages in cutting behavior up to three times a week. Isabella and Carol have locked up all knives and medications in the house, but Emma often steals sharp objects from school to cut herself with. Emma requires constant monitoring because of her instability.

Emma was recently suspended from school for fighting with another girl. Her parents are currently looking into the individualized education program (IEP) process, though Emma is resistant to the idea. Emma is performing at grade level and shows no cognitive delays. She has trouble with peer relationships and states she has no true friends. In the past year, Emma has also begun to leave the house during the day and night to meet up with men she met over the internet.

Emma is independent with all of her self-care but needs reminders to complete some personal hygiene tasks such as taking showers.

Isabella and Carol are looking for additional supports for themselves and Emma. Isabella hopes her daughter will become stable enough to one day visit her grandparents in Argentina. Both Isabella and Carol are very afraid of losing their daughter to suicide. They want her to be happy and have friends at school.

Summary

Emma, who has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and a personality disorder, is engaging in self-harm and suicidal behaviors. These risky behaviors, which also include meeting up with men from the internet, seem to be intensifying with time. Emma already has some supports, such as psychiatric medication, psychotherapist care, and psychiatrist care, but Carol and Isabella wonder what more can be done for their daughter. They are considering the IEP process.

Follow-Up Suggestions and Recommendations

1. *Make safety a priority; consider helping Emma get information on or perhaps taking a course in safe sexuality, including use of contraceptives.*
2. *Continue to locate recourses and those who may be able to make referrals to recourses in the school and community.*
3. *Explore prevocational and volunteer activities.*