



## Kids' Mental Health: Lessons from the Pandemic

### *Reflections on Depression*

**Jeanne Blake:** Chamique it's good to see you. Thanks for taking time.

**Chamique Holdsclaw:** Great to see you also. I'm excited about this.

**Jeanne:** It's hard to imagine we did our first interview together in 2007. Your video *Depression: True Stories* is still being used in schools and by organizations. Your message remains poignant and relevant. I'd like to show you a clip from that and have you respond.

**Chamique Holdsclaw in *Depression: True Stories*:** "It's like all my energy was just sucked out of me. I didn't go to practice. I have teammates I've formed bonds with over the years. It was this big thing. Where is she? There was a point – I was just like, I could take my car and just run it into this building, and it could all be over. I mean, I didn't think about shooting myself or jumping off a building. But it's the similar thoughts."

**Chamique:** Wow, when I hear myself – I was 27 years old, a young person – I didn't realize the power of my voice. I didn't understand asking for help. I wish I would have been able to communicate that I was struggling and gotten help earlier.

**Jeanne:** Did you recognize it as depression at the time?

**Chamique:** No, I didn't recognize it as depression. In my mind, I knew something was wrong, but I didn't recognize it as depression because of the stigma.

**Jeanne:** In the video, you, and the other young people we profiled, said it was a friend or loved one who recognized the symptoms and helped get them what could be lifesaving treatment. For you that person was coach Pat Summitt.

**Chamique:** I felt like I could be vulnerable to her. I was able to take those steps and understanding what therapy was, understanding what love and support from a genuine place was. I allowed myself to open up to love and support. Mental illness sometimes messes with your mind a little bit – you can think you're on the island by yourself. That's how I felt that time. She really stuck with me and to taking those steps forth to understand what healing was all about.

**Jeanne:** You've said many times that you learned that asking for help is a sign of strength, not a sign of weakness.

**Chamique:** Definitely. Asking for help about something as sensitive as your mental health, that's seen as a sign of weakness. I'm glad I've matured and understood that once I parted my lips and said, "I need help, I cannot do this alone" it was all the love and support that embraced me and changed my life.

**Jeanne:** You're sharing that now. You're on the road a lot, talking at high schools and colleges, with young people and young adults about mental health. What are you hearing and seeing about the state of mental health in young people today as you travel around and talk with them?

**Chamique:** I'm always saying the real change agents are young people. They are so strong and so fearless. I wasn't that brave when I was young. When I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, I wanted to find out who else has gone through this. In sports, we learned from the pioneers, right? I can name a list of people that I wanted to be like growing up. So now for

me, it was saying, “oh, my God, who do I want to follow?” The first thing when I Googled bipolar disorder, it was Catherine Zeta Jones, married to Michael Douglas, and I got to hear about her story. I was like, “Oh, my God, she's a big-time actress. She's a celebrity. If she could do it and talk about this, I can do it too.” I just wanted to be that person for other young people. They're like, Miss Holdsclaw - because I'm older now - I've never watched you play, but your story is amazing and now I want to go back and look at old tape of you playing, because you've got a new fan. That means a lot.

**Jeanne:** That sure does. In our earlier interview in 2007 you talked about some of the lessons you've learned. Let's play that. I'd like to have you respond.

**Chamique:** Okay, okay. (laughs)

**Jeanne:** It's positive (laughs) let's listen.

**Chamique Holdsclaw in *Depression: True Stories*:** “I'm in control of it [depression] now because I have an understanding. No more sitting in the dark letting stuff build up... not to get overwhelmed. And I breathe and count to ten. Just try to shift my attention and energy to a different direction. Just letting your friends know how you're doing, my friends letting me know how they're doing. Let's help each other. It creates this connection. It's very important.”

**Chamique:** Wow, that's amazing. Because I'm married, I have two young kids - two years old and 10 months - and those words that I said, I've lived that. That's a big part of my journey. My friends all know. I'm always checking in with everybody now. They've developed the skill to check in with their family and friends. And we discuss our mental health.

**Jeanne:** That's fantastic to hear. You've imparted a lot of guidance and advice for young people. What words of wisdom do you have for the trusted adults in kids' lives?

**Chamique:** You have to communicate, check in on them. You'll be surprised how many people I know say, “My kid doesn't talk” or “My kid shuts me out.” You have to have some type of relationship. Take them out. Participate in things they like, whether it be music – try to find something to connect with your child with. I was young – we all were young – we know we're going through so many different emotions, social pressures of fitting in, body changes. It's a lot. And then you tack on social media and kids feeling like they always have to operate in their best moment – which we know isn't reality. You have to raise your child because if you don't, the streets will raise them. I would rather my child communicate with me, and I know what's going on, because no one is going to love them like I love them.

**Jeanne:** It's so good to see you, Chamique. So good to see you doing so well.

**Chamique:** Thank you. It's a process, right? I just always want to embrace people with love and kindness.

**Jeanne:** A very hopeful note for us to end on.

**Chamique:** This is always great. Anything you need, I got you.

**If you have thoughts of suicide call 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline)**

**See our Additional Resources for:**

***Depression: True Stories* (26-minute video with Discussion Guide)**

***Depression Warning Signs in Adolescents and Young Adults* (PDF)**

*This interview was edited for brevity*

**Jeanne Blake, Blake Works CEO and creator of *Kids' Mental Health: Lessons from the Pandemic*, is a leadership communication coach, author and award-winning science and medical television journalist.**

**Chamique Holdsclaw is a former WNBA Basketball star, is a mental health advocate and was featured in *Words Can Work's Depression: True Stories*.**