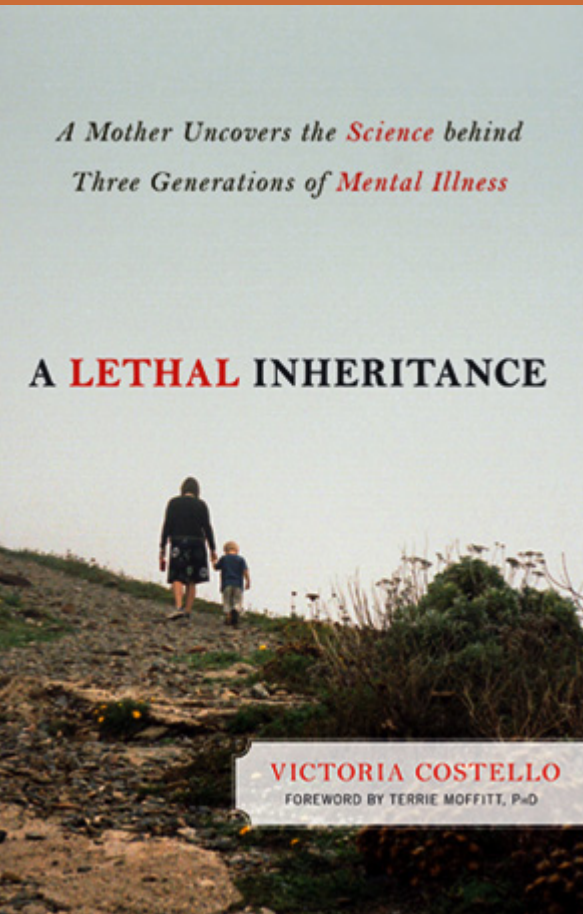


# MY FAMILY STORY



Victoria Costello

Parent advocate, science journalist,  
PLOS (The Public Library of Science)



## Alex's self portrait at 16.

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At age seventeen, my son Alex lost his ability to finish a whole sentence or get even a half night's sleep, or face the other kids at school.

Were these symptoms? If so, of what?



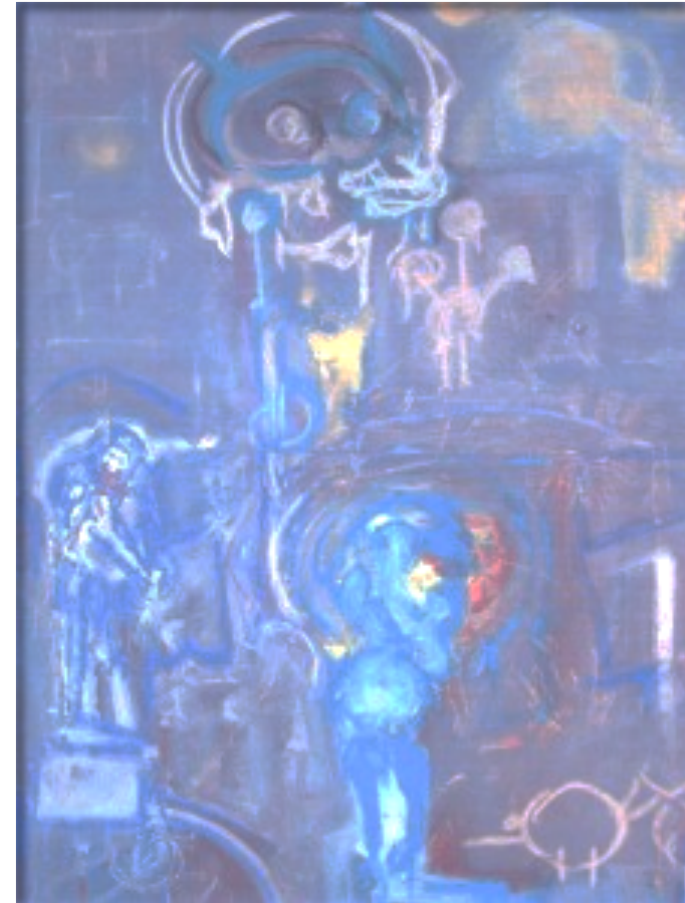
BUT how does a child go from

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THIS ...



TO THIS...



## A professional diagnosis

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“I have completed my diagnosis of Alex,” Dr. C said. “He has paranoid schizophrenia.”

“His condition is complicated by his recent use of marijuana and methamphetamine, but the underlying symptoms of paranoia and delusion are clearly present.

I’d like to keep him here for a month to stabilize him with an antipsychotic medication.”

# RISK FACTORS FOR EARLY PSYCHOSIS:

## Adolescent behaviors

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- Lower IQ, learning problems
- Social anxiety and withdrawal and/or depression
- Having two or fewer friends at age 17
- Antisocial and conduct disorders
- Acts of self harm
- Cannabis use before age 15

# RISK FACTORS for EARLY PSYCHOSIS:

## Family history

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Presence in the family of any of these:

- Schizophrenia (SZ)
- Any other psychotic disorder: bipolar disorder, severe depression with psychosis
- Suicide
- Repeated hospitalization for psychiatric disorders



As internationally recognized psychologist and pioneer in family studies Dr. Terrie Moffitt writes in the forward to *A Lethal Inheritance*...

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“Family history can make the difference between 'treat now' or 'wait and see.’”

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The treasure trove of information from longitudinal family studies

## Early intervention takes hold

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- Alex benefitted by going for treatment at a time (1998) when the concept of "early intervention" for the first symptoms of the psychosis that can lead to schizophrenia had just been introduced into treatment of what is also called early stage SZ.
- After three years spent in psychotherapy and taking a brief course of antipsychotic medication, Alex was able to return to school and ultimately complete his education at a prestigious art college. He is symptom free today.
- There are now early intervention clinics for psychosis in nearly every state and many countries.



## Parents are the best advocates for their own and their family's mental health.

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### Parents become advocates by:

- Using the intimate knowledge they have of their family members to understand the unique vulnerabilities they face individually and as a family.
- Learning about the scientific evidence concerning causes, symptoms, treatments, and prevention of mental illness – and applying these facts to themselves and their loved ones.
- Speaking out and taking action on what they know.

What is  
scientific  
evidence?

How can you  
use it to  
protect your  
family?

Factual, actionable evidence comes from research that is:

- PEER REVIEWED
- REPLICATED
- CLINICALLY TRANSLATED

Sources such as: Pubmed, PLOS, NIMH.  
NAMI.

# Why do I need to know about research?

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**1) *To protect yourself and your family from misleading media reports and misguided popular opinion.***

*Both* reinforce myths and misinterpretations of research into mental illness in general, and childhood mental disorders in particular.

## Robert F. Kennedy Jr.: Anti-Vaxxer

By Phil Plait



The Kennedy family name is laden with history and brings to mind a definite set of characteristics: glamor, power, intelligence, wealth, influence. Kennedys have had the name on a president, numerous senators, representatives, ambassadors, and other office holders.

# Why do I need to know about research?

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*2) Because of the often long delay between positive research findings and their entry into mental health clinical practice.*

So, even if you can get past your primary care gatekeeper to see a mental health specialist, you may not get evidence-based treatment. Your practitioner simply hasn't been exposed to or trained in applying these findings.

### 3. Personal experience and anecdotes are not enough

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*For example ADHD...*

*"Where were these kids [with ADHD] when I was growing up? ...I've never heard of this before."*

*"Well, these kids were there. They were the class clowns. They were the juvenile delinquents. They were the school dropouts. They were the kids who quit school at 14 or 15 because they weren't doing well."* [Russell Barkley](#)

# Treating earlier is better than waiting too long


By intervening early, you can usually begin with less onerous treatment, such as parent education and family therapy, and keep childhood mental disorders from becoming adult disorders.

*As my sons and I learned, the next best thing to "fixing the mother first" is getting help together.*

# GREAT RESOURCE!



SOURCE:  
[CHILD MIND STUDY  
CENTER](#)

[TOOLS & RESOURCES](#) | [GET INFORMED](#) | [FIND TREATMENT](#) | [SCIENCE & INNOVATION](#)




# SYMPTOM CHECKER

RELEASE 2.0 (BETA)

 PRINT  SHARE













## WHAT ISSUES HAVE BEEN CONCERNING YOU?

[START OVER](#) 

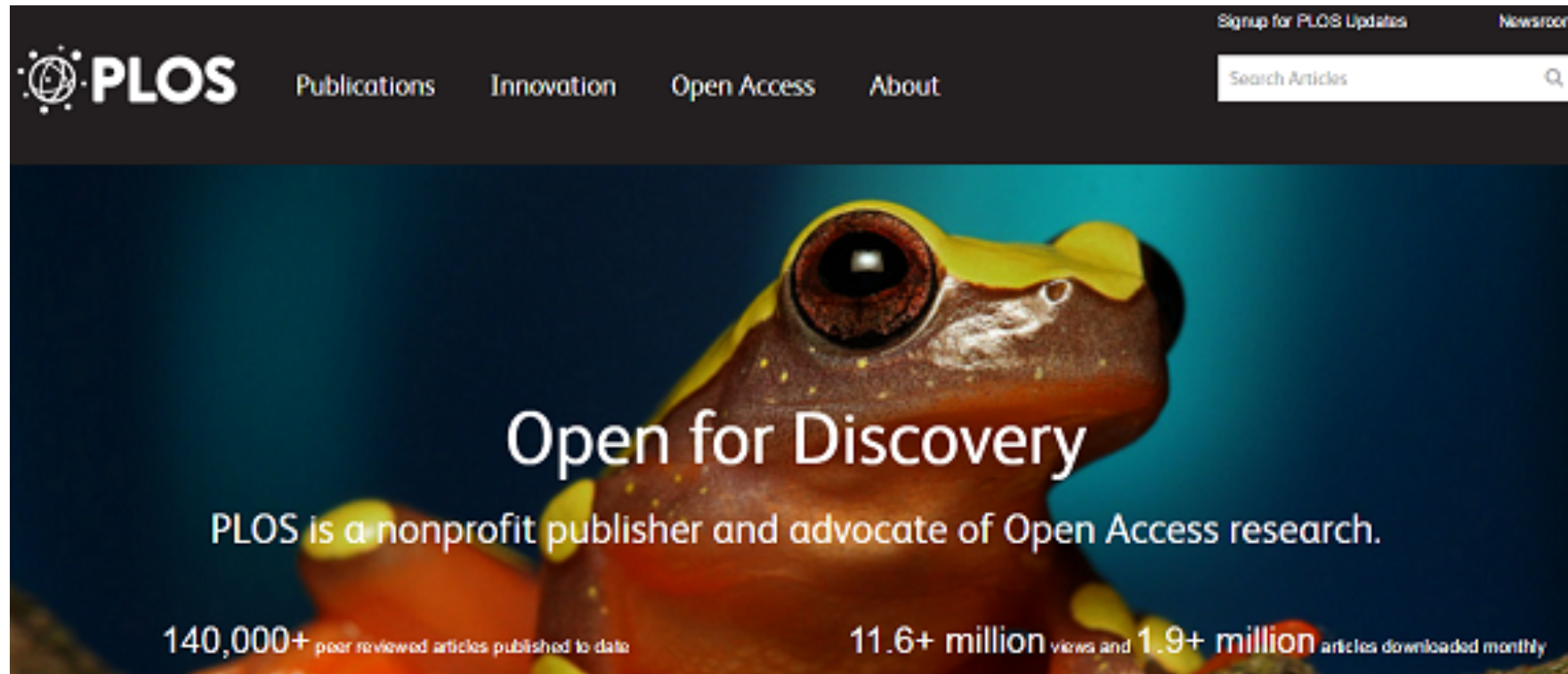
PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

[SKIP QUESTION](#) ▶

**I'm concerned that:**

- ☐ My child is disobedient 
- ☐ My child often breaks rules or gets in trouble 
- ☐ My child does things that are risky or dangerous 
- ☐ My child is impulsive or hyperactive 
- ☐ My child has trouble paying attention 
- ☐ My child has repetitive, rigid, or strange behaviors 
- ☐ My child is having problems in school 
- ☐ My child is moody or sad 
- ☐ My child has social problems 
- ☐ My child has excessive fears, worries, or very unusual thoughts 
- ☐ My child has eating or body image problems 
- ☐ My child has sleeping problems 

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