Teaching the Next Generation About Mental Illness
Developed by National Alliance on Mental Illness Nassau/NY

- Used in all 50 states
- Teacher-friendly
- Meets NM Health Standards
- 3 levels- upper elementary, middle and high school
- First person stories & games to illicit discussion
BTS in Action

• [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRUUmXv5nX28](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRUUmXv5nX28)

• Supported by the national, state and local NAMI affiliates.
What BTS teaches

• Mental illnesses are biological illnesses rather than character flaws.
• It’s okay to talk about them without shame.
• Break the negative stereotype and talk openly with peers, teachers, and parents.
• Learn to recognize the symptoms and how and where to get help. The earlier the treatment the better the outcome.
Why teach about mental illness?

• Mental illness is common and will affect one in four people over the course of their lives.
• Did you know that before the age of fourteen at least half of those who will develop a mental illness are already showing symptoms?
• Embarrassment & shame keep students from seeking help. Without understanding the biological nature of mental illness many students suffer in silence, and fear appearing weak or unable to help themselves.
• The stigma says it only happens to ‘troubled’ kids, kids from broken homes, kids who use drugs... the stereotypical list goes on.
Why continued

• According to AFSP, in the early 1990s evidence emerged that suicide awareness that stressed the association between mental disorders like depression and suicide were more effective.  
Dr. Michelle A. Scott from Columbia University

• 90% of people who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental illness. AFSP and nmsuicideprevention.org

• There is a gap between suicide prevention/awareness and education about mental illness.
Senator Dede Feldman

• “With one of the highest youth suicide rates in the nation, and an underfunded treatment system in New Mexico, we need to do everything we can to educate and mobilize the community. Here’s where it starts- in our schools. The curriculum will combat silence and negative stereotypes, and helpfully encourage compassion and informed assistance to the many families affected by mental illness.”
Research

• BTS has been empirically tested and results definitively conclude that BTS IS EFFECTIVE in increasing knowledge and changing attitudes and behavior relating to mental illness. The three year study sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to assess change in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior relating to mental illness in middle school students through instruction with “Breaking the Silence” (BTS) lessons has concluded that the BTS program is effective in promoting growth in these areas.
Be Proactive

• The new National Strategy for Suicide Prevention to be ready by 2014 states the need to develop and implement strategies to reduce the stigma associated with being a mental health consumer.
• Schools and public officials have been receptive. Many schools have already received the curriculum and have asked for presentations.
• Teaching about mental illness is as important as academic achievement, and will make a positive difference to the families of NM.