



Disabilities and Disorders

May 2011

The Verdadera staff encourages you to discuss and explore the issues and stories, as the publication aims not only to offer an outlet for expression, but to improve our lives. Keep in mind that the emotions that flow through the text and the feelings behind the words could be those of your child, your classmate, or your best friend.

Things to consider:

- *What is it like for those who care for and interact with those with disabilities or disorders?*
- *Do those with disabilities or disorders want sympathy or to be treated like everyone else?*
- *Do disabilities and disorders really change who the person really is?*

Student Submissions

Watching people with disabilities live their lives happily and then watching my own friends in school complain and whine and be ungrateful for what they don't have makes me realize that when we have everything we take everything for granted. Sometimes I see the special needs kids around campus and they are always so happy and smiley, and then i turn around and see that my friends are complaining about how they are too fat or that they got one bad grade. Even though they are disabled they don't let the trivial matters in life get to them because they are just happy for what they have. So sometimes I feel that they are the ones that can teach us something and that we are the ones that are actually in need of help.

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The only disability in life is a bad attitude.  
~ Scott Hamilton  
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I'd met blind people throughout my life, but last summer, for the first time, I spent extended periods of time with a blind person. My brother had met him at a summer camp, and this blind person was going to visit and stay at our house for several days. I was really nervous because I didn't know how you were supposed to treat someone with this disability and what you were supposed to do with them. Everything I thought of, just seemed like it wouldn't be fun for him, but I didn't really know. But when he came, we had a blast anyways, in whatever we were doing. I shouldn't have worried or thought of him any differently, because his blindness really did not make such a difference.

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For me, disability is a way of getting some extremity, some kind of very difficult situation, that throws an interesting light on people. ~ Mark Haddon  
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Somehow I've managed to avoid the awful experience of having a loved one pass away. I guess I'm lucky. But I feel like I'm TOO lucky sometimes... and that because I haven't endured pain and suffering from losing a loved one, all of a sudden my luck will run out and some kind of freak accident or terminal illness will kill someone I love.

This came close to happening once. Someone in my family was thought to have a life-threatening disease. I couldn't function right, I couldn't focus. We spent so much time with him, making sure we valued every single second, just in case the sand in his hourglass was about to run out.

But a miracle happened and God turned his hourglass back over again -- the test for the disease was negative. Things went back to normal though... We stopped spending so much time together.

Still, my paranoid mind wonders when these miracles will stop happening in my life. I suppose all I can do for now is savor the few moments I still spend with that family member, just in case... He doesn't know it, but I thank God every day that he is well.

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Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses.

~ Alphonse Karr

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Disabilities. It is defined as a lack of adequate power, strength, or mental or physical ability; incapacity. No one wants to be born with them. Regardless whether we like them or not, those with disabilities exist in our society. Besides the physical obstructions in their daily lives, those with disabilities also face the insensitive taunts and jeers of their peers. Those with disabilities live in a cruel world where physical appearances and shallow perceptions of people dictate whether you are normal or a total nut job. Neglected by everyone around them, how do they manage to cope with our insensitivity? After all, who would even bother to talk to them much less associate themselves with these so called "freaks?" Those with disabilities may have a physical deformity or possibly a mental impairment, but I believe it is us, those without any evident disabilities, that have the greatest disorder of them all: our ability to turn against our conscience and better thinking to

consciously hurt those who cannot defend for themselves.

Sure, this may seem too radical, but give it some thought. Has anyone actually tried to talk to someone with autism and hang out with them or did you just look, scoff, and turn away laughing with your friends at that "weirdo?" Has anyone ever tried to befriend someone with a disability or did you just walk away in fear of being labeled as a "freak" along with the kid? Has anyone ever tried to engage with an impaired individual and help that student or did you just coincidentally remembered that "No, why should I help this random guy? They won't ever help me. Besides someone is bound to help them..." Sadly, no one will ever remember to help that fellow in need, except for a few out there that, regardless how others see them as, they are devoted to helping others. Those few and rare exceptions are the real ones without any disabilities or disorders. They have no disorder because they use their reasoning to help them understand the pain that these kids with disorders face and try to help them cope with the world that is full of insensitivity

To be honest, at first I had a single strategy: when they come, move fast, avoid contact, and get the hell out of there before shit happens. Sure, I was a major a-hole for thinking that, but come on, for anyone who says they have never given thought about that strategy, you know they are bullshitting you. Anyways, I am walking with my friends, when I see this mentally retarded kid limping across the campus and blabbering to himself. However, one of the most sickening things I have ever witnessed happened. A group of kids, bigger and stronger than him, walked up to him and started shoving him around. At first, I thought it was a bit funny, but all that laughter abruptly stopped when I saw them intentionally hurting him. Paralyzed by insecurity, my conscience told me to help him, but my mind told to refer to my strategy: avoid contact and labeling. All of a sudden, one of my friends walked the other way and confronted the bullies. Being bigger than them, he scared them off and helped the autistic kid up. After a few laughs and a few exchanges, the kid left and my friend came back. We couldn't believe this guy. One moment he was laughing at our impersonations of a mentally retarded guy on Youtube and the next he acts like a Mother Teresa and saves the autistic kid. My friends and I laughed at him and asked him why he did

it. All he did was shrug and said the word that I would always remember: Its not a matter of whether I like doing it or something like that. It's the fact that if no one did it, who would? That act was not a voluntary act. It is my duty as one who lacks impairment or any problems to help those in need. Those words still continue to influence my interactions with others.

Although I didn't understand at the time being, I can finally relate to what the dear friend said those years back. Next time you see an individual struggling with something, strive for the best and help that fellow out!

I was slightly brain damaged at birth, and I want people like me to see that they shouldn't let a disability get in the way. I want to raise awareness - I want to turn my disability into ability. ~ Susan Boyle

Many will disagree with me when I say that homosexuality is a disorder or even a disability--and it's definitely not what people think of when they hear the word disability. But for me, it has disabled a part of me and has taken the order out of my life. I wish I were normal. I realized this when I was waiting to watch a movie with one of my best friends and his friend who I wasn't so close to. We were talking about past girlfriends or crushes or something like that, and out of nowhere my close friend turns to be and asks "Are you gay?" and his friend "yeah, are you?" But it wasn't a warm question, it wasn't as if they cared about me or wanted to let me know they accepted me. The way they asked was filled with disdain; the way they surrounded me felt like they were going to beat me. "No" I said "of course I'm not." It was like the way you'd ask someone if they were cheating, like some fucked up intervention. And I still wonder what would've happened had I said yes. Would I have lost one of my best friends--who I've known for six years? Would the whole school know? Would they see me just as gay, as a label as if that were all there were to me? Or do I have the right to not even call him my friend? All I know was that I hate that part of me. I don't think people understand what it's like to be gay. It's ruining my life.

It was ability that mattered, not disability, which is a word I'm not crazy about using. ~ Marlee Matlin

I'm always taken aback by people with have disabilities or disorders—physical or psychological. I don't mean to say that I'm afraid or averse to them, more like confused. When I'm in the company with those with

disabilities or disorders I an unsure how to approach them. Do I offer them sympathy or treat them just like everyone else? Do I treat them differently and with more caution because of their differences? Or do I treat them just as I would treat any other person? I really wish I knew.

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced. ~ James Baldwin

Although I don't have any disorders or diseases I have seen the way it affects those who do. This is one of those things that people can hide. The fact that they have diabetes isn't apparent on their face or their ADD is hidden in their pills. But some diseases everyone can see. One of my friends has a disease that causes her body to jolt at random moments. From the look of her, you would never think she had any problem with it. When it happens she just moves along in the conversation. You pretty much believe that because she has had it for so long, you should just move on. But one day a couple years ago, she cried about it, telling a group why it is so hard to live with people staring at her and questioning it. You never really realize how this affects someone's life. Whether the disease is inside or can be seen, whether the victim shows it or not, I can't believe it changes their life so much.

I am neither an optimist nor pessimist, but a possibilist. ~ Max Lerner

It sucks when life gives you no solutions. Stuck in a corner. But that's what having a disorder is like, you know? Even if I'm not the one with the disorder, it affects my whole family. The periods of arguments and seriousness, the reality of my family problems comes through every so often. I close my eyes, go to sleep, and in the morning they're seemingly gone, a nightmare if you will. Deep down I know I've been running away from it all. I know I'm lying to myself when I say its alright. I realize I have been turning my back on a lot of my family members. Okay, well all of them. Sometimes its because of school work or maybe I just use them as excuses. But damn it I'm fifteen. You see, my brother has A.D.D. but not the type where he's hyper and thoughts zoom in and out of his head; that's only when he's on Adderall. When he was growing up everyone thought he was lazy and that he was stupid that's why he got F's in school. He wasn't diagnosed with A.D.D. till he was in college. On the surface everything is fine,

he just seems socially awkward because of it, and he's very ashamed. He has so much potential and pain, it all comes spewing out when he takes his pills. But otherwise, his thoughts come slowly one at a time. That's one reason why he gets very offended at the word retarded. But his pills are very expensive, and on top of that they only give him a coverage of 3 hours max. It's comparable to an energy drink; he gets the crash after and it's all downhill after that. He won't talk for days, he'll sit in a corner unable to speak, rocking back and forth with his knees drawn to his chest. Sometimes he'll have moodswings and he'll violently lash out at me, and it's impossible to argue with him because he always has to be right even if he knows he's wrong. And then later when he has time to reflect on all the things he had said he'll feel terrible for weeks and hate himself inside. Because he can't move on even after I tell him I have accepted his apology. He is clinically depressed because depression accompanies A.D.D. and he can't even finish college because of his disorder. It definitely affects my family. My mom sometimes wishes he wasn't born. I remember one night after a particular argument between me and my brother, these were my thoughts that were bottled up inside me. Of course I did not say this to him, he would probably commit suicide if I ever said these things to him: "Your words struck me as almost heartbreaking today. You think I'm not doing enough? That I'm never there for you? That you don't need support, instead you need me to fix your life? Well I can't. It's a lifetime chronic kind of thing. I can't even begin to sort it out, all the problems in our family, not just your personal ones. Family is to support, and I just can't change things that can't be changed, no matter how much you yell at me, no matter how useless you say I am, no matter how much I actually care. I could dedicate my life to finding a cure for you but find nothing. Why I was born "normal" and you weren't, I just don't even know. I'd give anything to switch places with you. You have so much potential lucked up inside, I know. Of everyone in the world, I know. How could you say I don't even care? Maybe I try to ignore you sometimes because I'm sick of it. Of trying to figure things out that can't be figured out, trying to make decisions I'm not qualified to make, to listen to you for 6 hours at a time. You said I'm tired of hearing you talk, and as horrifying as it is, I am. Because I'm helpless. I'm drowning along side with

you. I'm doing the best I can. But you always have a way of turning on me. The scary thing is that you're getting worse. What will I have to remember you by? I don't want to remember you as a burden. This cycle will never end until one of us dies. Lord knows you're proud of me, and you love me more than you trust or love anyone else on this Earth. But it's that kind of admiration that's poison. Your desperate grip on me is suffocating. I'm fifteen. But you're family and I love you so I will let you choke me, give all I can give, even if you think my good isn't good enough. be gay. It's ruining my life.

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Disability is not a brave struggle or 'courage in the face of adversity.' Disability is an art. It's an ingenious way to live. ~Neil Marcus  
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There was this girl who was in two of my classes last year, Jackie. She would randomly shout and giggle during class. She would speak incomprehensibly. She could never understand what was going on in class. The only person she would hang out with would be someone I assume works at Monta Vista, whose job I think was to just guide her around school. And even she didn't care too much about Jackie--she spent most of her day texting and sighing impatiently. I mean, some people would be nice and have a one-sided conversation with her every once in a while. But I don't think she's eaten lunch with other students. I don't think she ever had any real friends. I'm not sure if it'd be possible for her to lead a normal social life--whatever that may be.

But despite all that, I would always see her with a big smile on her face. Her English isn't great. But she knows how to communicate in a universal language: laughing. She probably won't get into a great college, land a hotshot job, or live wealthy. But she'll be successful in life, since success in life is determined by happiness, not annual income.

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Old or young, healthy as a horse or a person with a disability that hasn't kept you down, man or woman, Native American, native born, immigrant, straight or gay -- whatever; the test ought to be I believe in the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence. I believe in religious liberty. I believe in freedom of speech. I believe in working hard and playing by the rules. I'm showing up for work tomorrow. I'm building that bridge to the 21st century. That ought to be the test. ~ Bill Clinton  
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Disabilities & Disorders

by Maureen R. Johnston, MFT

For most of my life I have viewed myself as a basically self-reliant, able-bodied, and competent person. Although I've never run a marathon, or even really considered myself particularly athletic, I have maintained a pretty active lifestyle. So, when I had elective foot surgery a few months ago, I grudgingly entered a whole new world: that of the physically disabled. One day I was able to go for a three mile jog, the next I was eligible for a handicap placard for my car.

While I've always had compassion for the wheelchair bound and others with obvious physical disabilities, it was only when I joined their ranks that I began to understand what it's really like to try to navigate a world designed by and for the physically abled. Using just one example: I was humiliated and appalled to learn how difficult it can be to open many doors, even the ones at the top of wheelchair ramps. Needing to ask for help for something as simple and mundane as opening a door was frustrating, embarrassing, and humbling.

In my work as a psychotherapist, I spend much of my time dealing with another type of disability, one that's that's no less debilitating, but is much less understood: the world of the "mental disorders". Every day I work with teens, children, and adults who battle depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-injurious behaviors, substance abuse, and other painful difficulties. We have to deal not just with the disorders themselves, but unfortunately the embarrassment and shame that too often accompany them.

Reactions to students' submissions

The discomfort that many people feel when they encounter someone with an apparent disability was evident in some of the students' writing. It can be difficult to know how to act, even when we have the best of intentions. It becomes even more complicated when our peers treat the person with insensitivity or even cruelty. I believe most people want to do what's right, but ignorance, discomfort, fear, shame, and a host of other feelings get in the way, and lead to disrespect or even harassment.

Different types – different reactions

I think as a whole, our society has an easier time accepting some disabilities more than others. For example, while my foot was in a cast and I was using a knee walker to get around, many people approached me in public and asked questions about it. I believe that they felt more comfortable doing this since I appeared basically "normal" and was just experiencing a temporary situation. But, many people who are in wheelchairs report that it is common for them to feel invisible or seen as 'less than', and that strangers will address their companions and speak of them in the third person, as though they're incapable of speaking for themselves. We also have an easier time accepting that someone with an obvious physical impairment needs special accommodations than we accept that someone whose impairments are seen as "only" emotional or psychological. There is still a great deal of judgment and criticism toward people who suffer from psychological disorders. Sadly, many people with learning disabilities or processing disorders are still labeled as "stupid" and are ridiculed and shamed.

Some suggestions

The terms "disability" and "disorder" encompass such a wide and diverse range it would be impractical to try to give space to all of them in this article. As a general guideline, try to treat everyone with respect, compassion, and dignity. Try to imagine how you'd want to be treated, and use that to help guide your actions.

If you have, or think you might have, a disability or disorder...

Know that you are not alone and it is helpful to learn how other people who are similar to you deal with it. Try to remember your disability/disorder does not define who you are as a person. Seek assistance, knowledge, and support.

If you have a loved one with a disorder or disability...

One of the students wrote about some of the difficulties of living with a sibling with a disorder. It was clear that even though they loved him very much, he absorbed a great deal of the family's energy, attention, and time. This is very common and causes a lot of stress on all the individuals in the family. It is normal for parents, siblings, and children of someone with a disability or disorder to experience a wide range of often conflicting emotions, which may be confusing, exhausting, and frightening all at the same time.

When you encounter someone with a disability or disorder...

Be aware of how you're speaking. According to www.DisabilityisNatural.com "Words are powerful! Words reflect our feelings and thoughts. When speaking about a person with a disability, always put the person first and stress people's abilities. It is not about political correctness; it is about respect and dignity." Their table below suggests some examples of ways to phrase things in a more sensitive, respectful manner.

<i>Say...</i>	<i>Instead of...</i>
Person with a disability	The handicapped
Tom has autism	He's autistic
Sarah is a little person	She's a dwarf/midget
Jim uses a wheelchair	He's wheelchair bound
She needs...	She has special needs
Kids without disabilities	Normal/typical kids

Discerning between 'normal developmental issues' and disorders that call for professional assistance

While we all know that adolescence is a time of great change and many challenges, it is important for teens and their parents to recognize the signs that indicate when the difficulties they're experiencing require professional assistance. While you may not be comfortable thinking what is happening is a "disorder", it may be quite disabling, and thus in need of serious attention. The list below is of just some of the indicators of more serious problems that teens face. While it is not all inclusive, if you or your teenager are noticing any of these, and especially if you are seeing more than a couple of these, then it is time to consider seeking outside help.

Some warning signs...

- Sudden, dramatic shifts in mood
- Difficulties with sleep (insomnia, frequent nightmares, sleeping all the time)
- Frequent crying spells
- Flat affect/mood
- Seems sad a lot of the time
- Frequent irritability
- Lack of enjoyment in normally fun activities
- Seems stressed out a lot of the time
- Highly ritualized behaviors, especially those that lead to strong reactions if interrupted
- Sudden shift in friends, activities, appearance, and/or values
- Becoming secretive, defiant, and/or hypersensitive
- Unexplainable episodes of hyperactivity
- Sudden change in weight, either direction
- Strong need to control what eat
- Difficulty focusing and paying attention
- Difficulty making and keeping friends
- Strong resistance to attending school
- A need to keep the skin on arms/legs hidden from sight

While it is reducing, for many people there is still a stigma associated with seeking psychotherapy. This is very unfortunate as it leads to people delaying seeking appropriate treatment until the suffering is intense and more difficult to treat. For too many people, having some sort of emotional or psychological difficulty is seen as somehow weak or shameful, and that they just need to "buck up". But, expecting someone who is struggling with depression, anxiety, or the other psychological disorders to just forge ahead as though everything is normal, is as thoughtless and cruel as expecting someone in a wheelchair to try to open a heavy door on their own.

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Maureen writes an online newsletter Sense and Psychotherapy: Reflections From a Psychotherapist's Perspective. If you would like to be added to her mailing list, feel free to contact her at her email address. To see past articles and essays that she has written go to <http://www.associatedcounselors.com/articles.html>

A Few Disability Stats and Facts from the Disability Funders Network

- People with disabilities constitute the nation's largest minority group, and the only group any of us can become a member of at any time.
- Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Americans with disabilities increased 25 percent, outpacing any other subgroup of the U.S. population.
- People with disabilities represent the single largest minority group seeking employment in today's marketplace.
- Of the 69.6 million families in the United States, more than 20 million have at least one family member with a disability.
- According to the U.S. Department of Education, workers with disabilities are rated consistently as average or above average in performance, quality and quantity of work, flexibility, and attendance.
- 2.3 million undergrad & grad students reported disabilities in 2004, more than double the 1.1 million reported in 1996
- The employment rate for people with disabilities was 38.1% in 2005, roughly half of that for people without disabilities
- There are 133 million people in the United States living with a chronic health condition. That number is expected to increase by more than one percent a year to 150 million by 2030. 75 percent of people with chronic health conditions are younger than 65
- Globally, people with disabilities represent an emerging market on par with the size of China
- Approximately 54 million Americans have at least one disability, making them the largest minority group in the nation. As our baby boomer population ages and more veterans return from war, this number will double in the next 20 years.
- Notwithstanding the strides made in disability rights in the past 25 years, the majority of people with disabilities are poor, under-employed and under-educated due largely to unequal opportunities. It is a diverse group, crossing lines of age, ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status.
- For more than a third of individuals with disabilities, assistive technology is essential to being able to take care of themselves at home. (source: [2004 Harris Poll](#))
- Of the 49.7 million noninstitutionalized individuals aged five and older who reported having a disability in the U.S. 2000 Census (source: [U.S. Census 2000](#))
- 9.3 million reported having a sensory disability involving sight or hearing.
- 21.2 million reported having a disability that limits their ability to engage in basic physical activity such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying.
- 12.4 million reported having a physical, mental or emotional condition that makes it difficult to learn, remember or concentrate.
- 6.8 million reported a physical, mental or emotional condition that makes it difficult to dress, bathe or get around inside the home.
- 18.2 million reported their disability makes it difficult to venture outside the home.

Some info from the National Institute of Mental Health

- Mental disorders are common among children in the United States, and can be particularly difficult for the children themselves and their caregivers. While mental disorders are widespread, the main burden of illness is concentrated among those suffering from a seriously debilitating mental illness. Just over 20 percent (or 1 in 5) children, either currently or at some point during their life, have had a seriously debilitating mental disorder.
- Lifetime prevalence of mental disorders among 13-18 yr olds – 46.3%
- Lifetime prevalence of “severe” disorder among 13-18 yr olds - 21.4%
- Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress and can actually be beneficial in some situations. For some people, however, anxiety can become excessive, and while the person suffering may realize it is excessive they may also have difficulty controlling it and it may negatively affect their day-to-day living. There are a wide variety of anxiety disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and specific phobias to name a few. Collectively they are among the most common mental disorders experienced by Americans.
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common childhood disorders and can continue through adolescence and into adulthood. Symptoms include difficulty staying focused and paying attention, difficulty controlling behavior, and hyperactivity (over-activity).
- While many people are concerned about what they eat and their body image, eating disorders are marked by extremes. They are present when a person experiences severe disturbances in their eating behavior, such as extreme reduction of food intake or extreme overeating, or feelings of extreme distress or concern about body weight or shape. It is estimated that 2.7 percent of 13 to 17 year olds, suffer from an eating disorder and that girls are more than two and a half times as likely as boys to have an eating disorder.
- Mood disorders represent a category of mental disorders in which the underlying problem primarily affects a person's persistent emotional state (their mood). The statistics show that at least 14% of 13 to 17 year olds have experienced a major depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder, and/or bipolar disorder.
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/statistics/index.shtml>

Resources from the Verdadera Staff and Professional

Online Resources

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention Link: (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/mental.htm>)
- Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (<http://www.chadd.org>)
- Council for Disability Awareness (http://www.disabilitycanhappen.org/chances_disability/disability_stats.asp)
- National Organization on Disability (<http://www.nod.org>)
- Americans with Disabilities Act U.S. Department of Justice (<http://www.ada.gov/>)

Print Resources

- *Extraordinary People with Disabilities* by K. Quinlan
- *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability* by P. Longmore
- *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* by J. Shapiro
- *What You Must Think of Me: A Firsthand Account of One Teenager's Experience with Social Anxiety Disorder* by E. Ford, M. Liebowitz, & L Wasmer Andrews
- *My Anxious Mind: A Teen's Guide to Managing Anxiety and Panic* by M. Tompkins, K. Martinez, & M. Sloan

Ways to Submit

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2. Stories can be turned in to **any staff member** – hardcopies or emails, anything is welcomed. Staff members are also there to help answer your questions about issues, topics, anything.
3. Email it to verdadera.entries@gmail.com



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Verdadera is a publication created by and for Monta Vista students for the purpose of instigating communication concerning the reality of high school within the community. Each month, an issue on a topic relevant to the lives of our students is sent home for reading by both parents and students. While we do not edit submissions, we aim to publish personal experiences, not opinion articles. Please utilize all the resources present and feel free to email comments and feedback.

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