

it's time to talk. it's

time to change

let's end mental health discrimination

Dear Parents,

Do you think that your child would come to you if they were worried about their own or a friend's mental health? Are you sure?

I am writing to you, as a fellow parent, about mental health because I know from personal experience that it is very important.

Did you know that 1 in 10 young people will experience a mental health problem before the age of 16? That's an average of 3 children in an average classroom in England. And it's 1 in 4 adults too. This means that you and your child know someone with a mental health problem.

It never occurred to my wife and I that one of our children would experience mental illness and we never talked about it. When we discovered, just over four years ago, that our daughter, then 14, had started self-harming, we didn't know where to turn or what to do. We thought that we had a happy family, with everybody busy (in a good way) and both our children doing very well at their respective schools. Then, suddenly, all our lives were turned upside down. Our daughter had to be admitted to hospital and it seemed that we had lost our beautiful girl.

She became increasingly unstable and suicidal. Her school were unsupportive and she eventually left. After more than two years at three different adolescent psychiatric units, she recovered, stopped self-harming and came out of hospital. Having lost part of her life over a period of three years, our daughter resumed her education and is now able to enjoy being a teenager, having coffee with friends; going out for meals; going to the cinema and just being able to walk our dog and feel the warmth of the sun on her back. It has been a long journey for us as a family and we consider ourselves fortunate to have our daughter back at home with us. Other families in the same situation have not always been so lucky.

Sadly, most people with mental health problems experience stigma and discrimination from others, even those closest to them.

We can all play a part in helping to end stigma by learning more about mental health and discussing it more openly.

Many people aren't aware that it is entirely possible to recover from mental health problems, even

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from episodes of severe depression, eating disorders or psychosis, particularly if treatment is accessed early. My family's experience is living proof of that.

Don't assume that your child would come to you. Make time to talk.

Here's how:

- Time to Change; England's biggest campaign to end the stigma and discrimination faced by people with mental health problems, has created a brilliant web page full of resources for parents to help start the conversation about mental health.
www.time-to-change.org.uk/parents
- Time to Change want talking about mental health to become as ordinary as talking about physical health, so that everyone can ask for the support that they need.
- Have a look at the Time to Change website and please... make time to talk.
- Finally - if you or your child is experiencing a mental health problem, the Time to Change website can direct you to organisations which are there to help:
<http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/what-are-mental-health-problems/help-support-services>

Thank you.

With best wishes,

Robert