Women's Health Presentation

Mental Health

Mental health stigma and discrimination affects people of all ages and backgrounds. It can impact on the individual, and their families, emotionally, socially, psychologically, physically and financially. It can affect relationships, friendships and employment opportunities.

In the worst cases, mental health stigma and discrimination can take lives, and this can NEVER be okay!

Today, I'd like to provide you with a brief insight into the life of someone with living experience of poor mental health, me.

Isn't it strange how these same words can be interpreted differently by each and every one of us? A really powerful thing to recognise from this is that we're all unique and we all experience situations differently. I believe that recognising this helps us to be kinder to one another - we need to stop listening to reply and listen to understand.

Everyone has got a story to tell whether they shout or whether they yell. We need to take the time to understand what it's like to walk a mile in another person's shoes. I believe that this will help break down the stigma. Hopefully the story I'm going to share with you helps to depict the statement that where there is darkness there is light.

I'll set the scene – it's early Thursday evening and I'm catching up on some ironing in a very quiet living room before I head out to the local cinema. My surrounding space being quite the contradiction to my riotous mind. For almost 2 months prior to this moment, I had quite expertly managed to lock in my dark thoughts and feelings. During that time, a number of unpleasant things had happened but nothing out of the ordinary.

So back to the ironing -which funnily enough happens to be a phrase I use often!- a wealth of thoughts engulfed me standing there and before I knew it I was sobbing uncontrollably and screaming at the top of my voice for somebody to help me (whilst still ironing may I add – it seems I'm clearly committed to the cause even whilst having a breakdown!)

I was adamant I was making it to the cinema that evening – I was going to see I, Daniel Blake and had heard great reviews. On the way there, I again cried uncontrollably whilst threatening myself to veer off the motorway (the pictures are still far too vivid for my liking!)

I was in such a dark place, I just couldn't carry on. Even reflecting on this horrific moment makes me feel sick. I have 2 lovely children, a doting husband, a good job and great friends but what I didn't have was a healthy state of mind and believe me for someone that is affected by poor mental health this is like a winning lottery ticket.

Anyway, somehow I managed to get to the cinema and watch the film and got back into the car. However, this time I didn't go home on the motorway, I decided I was going to take a back road, a road I've never taken before but knew where it went because this time I was going to do it, it would be easier this way. Again, I threatened myself to veer off the road, convincing myself that everyone would be better off without me, I think the only thing that stopped me was the fact that I was too scared it didn't work.

Everyone was in bed when I got home and I didn't plan to tell my husband but, and this part is blurry. The next thing I remember is standing at the foot of the bed with him in front of me whilst I nonchalantly mentioned that I wanted to take my own life. Again, I can't recall much of the conversation but he made sure I attended the GP the following day and clearly they were concerned that I had suicidal ideations and signed me off work (I was already taking meds – I have been since I had my first child when I was first diagnosed with post-natal depression).

The next couple of months had it's highs and lows for me and I suppose everyone around me. You see depression is a constant vigil that I need to stay alert to and I do this through daily meds but what I find really helpful is an abundance of self-help strategies that I have invested in over the years. It took a lot for me to start to self-care as somewhere along my adverse childhood experiences I developed a lack of self-worth and saw self-care as being selfish. However, therapeutic sessions have made me realise that if you give everything to everyone else there's nothing left in the pot for you unfortunately. Which is basically the direction I was unknowingly travelling in when I hit rock bottom a few years ago.

What I have also found helpful is to not feel ashamed of my illness, I am not ashamed to share with the world that I have poor mental health and have to take medication to feel better just as an individual with diabetes would take their much needed meds. I'm very likely to have this for the rest of my life but I certainly won't allow it to define me.

The last thing we need is to pick holes in one other we need to be supportive. It's about picking people up, not tearing them down!

A values system that sees having a mental health problem as a weakness can lead to unsympathetic or hostile responses that can in turn make a bad situation worse. By contrast, adopting a more strengths based/solution focused approach which values the person can lead to a supportive and constructive approach.

I want to finish today by encouraging you all to keep following your passions, invest in what you believe in and remember there's nothing in this life that means more than you!