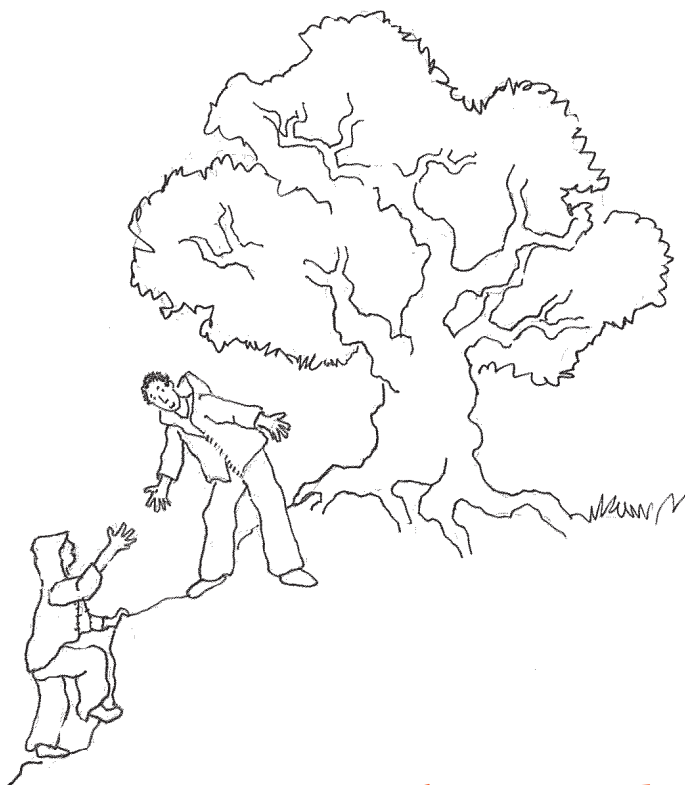


Young Adult Personal Stories of Recovery towards Mental Health

You can do it...



But you can't do it alone



World Community
Mental Health
Movement in Ireland

The information in this booklet has been sourced from:

GROW Community Mental Health (Ireland)
www.grow.ie

GROW is Ireland's largest community based mutual help organisation working in the area of mental health. It is very well established in Ireland since 1969. It has a network of 100+ support groups nationwide. GROW weekly support meetings are

- Confidential
- Open to all
- Free

For information about your nearest weekly meeting, contact the GROW Infoline at 1890 474 474 or visit www.grow.ie

Young Peoples Mental Health Awareness Campaign
www.letsomeoneknow.ie

letsomeoneknow.ie is a website which contains information, help and advice about the most common mental health issues that affect young people. This website has been developed as part of the Young Peoples Mental Health awareness campaign. The campaign and this website were initiated and funded by the HSE.

For more information visit the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention website
www.nosp.ie



World Community
Mental Health
Movement in Ireland



CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
What is Mental Health?.....	3
Personal Stories Section.....	4
Suicidal Thoughts.....	5
Depression.....	11
Bullying.....	15
Bereavement.....	21
Bi-Polar.....	25
Family Problems.....	28
Anxiety.....	32
Drugs.....	36
Minding your Mental Health.....	41
Look out for others.....	44
Need Help?.....	46

Introduction

The aim of this booklet is to promote awareness and reduce stigma associated with suicidal behaviour and mental distress faced by young adults in Ireland today.

This booklet has been compiled using personal stories from young adults who have directly experienced the struggle of dealing with various Mental Health problems.

The material and content has been provided jointly by GROW Community Mental Health Ireland and the National Office for Suicide Prevention in order to promote the Letsomeoneknow.ie awareness campaign.

This booklet also aims to show the benefit of using support groups as a tool in recovery from mental health problems.

Below are some of the organizations who provide free weekly support groups.

Web-based Support groups / Forums

www.spunout.ie

www.bodywhys.ie

Weekly Support groups

www.grow.ie

www.recovery-inc-ireland.ie

www.aware.ie

For a more extensive list of supports available visit
www.yourmentalhealth.ie

What is Mental Health?

It's easy to see when something's wrong with us physically. But what about our mental health?

If people don't even notice you've got a problem, they're not going to offer to help.

Mental health is something we all have and it is something we should take steps to protect in the same way we guard our physical health.

If you can get your head in the right place then you've got the strength to handle anything life throws at you.

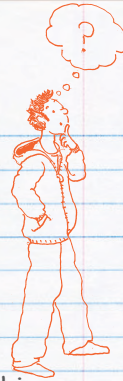
Why focus on young people?

A number of recent studies have found that three-quarters of adults with a history of mental illness had clear signs of being in crisis when they were 18 years old and half of them were in crisis at 15 years old. In other words, to avoid bigger problems later, sort out the issues at the start.

The evidence shows that early action and help is overwhelmingly more effective than leaving problems to grow.

It's really important to act. Suicide is now the leading cause of death in young men, aged 15-24 in Ireland. A quarter of all deaths by suicide between 2000 and 2004 occurred in young adults in their 20s. According to the World Health Organization, Ireland now has the fourth highest rate of suicide in people aged 15-24 in the EU.

The good news is that there are plenty of people and organisations out there who are just waiting to help



Personal Stories Section

The personal stories in this section have been written by young adults who attend GROW Mental Health weekly support groups. All have had direct experience of dealing with mental health problems. They wanted to share their stories in order to offer hope to other young adults who might be currently experiencing similar problems. Some names have been changed to protect anonymity.

Note: The stories in this booklet cover only a small sample of topics. For more topics check out the websites below. Each has their own personal stories section.

www.spunout.ie

www.headsup.ie

www.bodywhys.ie

www.grow.ie



Suicidal Thoughts by Anthony

Through national school and the first two years of secondary, I was happy, but then things started to get bad.

Nothing particular happened or changed apart from my own feelings. I started to lack confidence. I began to feel different, and I had low self-esteem. Despite this, I got through Secondary and passed the Leaving Cert. I got a place in college and passed the first year. I got an A grade average. I was really dedicated to it and was looking forward to going back to complete the course. However, things didn't work out that way.

I got a summer job working for a builder. It was around this time that things started to go really downhill. I became very anxious and unsettled at work. I found it hard to interact with my work colleagues and became withdrawn. It was the start of my breakdown, but didn't realise it at the time.

I constantly thought other people were talking about me in a negative way. I struggled through the rest of the summer but was a nervous wreck at this stage. I didn't want to answer the door to anyone or talk to people on the phone. In fact, my heart would start racing if the phone or doorbell rang. I would lock



myself away not wanting to see anyone or let them see me like this. I even shunned my own family and became increasingly agitated with them.

The hours seemed like days. I was hiding under the covers, hoping, and wishing things would get better. When I had to go back to college, I was literally shaking. I lasted half a day and had to leave but I knew I couldn't get away from my torment. It was around this time I had my first suicidal thoughts.

A few weeks after this I remember my uncle calling around and getting me to meet my doctor who advised me to go to hospital.

The next thing I know I'm in hospital with all these people watching me and analysing me. I felt I would never recover and get out.

While I was in hospital, I thought an awful lot about ending my life. I was in hospital for six weeks, (it might as well have been six years). I suppose I recovered enough to be discharged but things still weren't great.

After leaving hospital I took an overdose of tablets. I was brought into hospital again. I was only in there for a week. When I told the doctor, he gave me an injection. After the injection, things started to take an upturn. I started feeling really good about myself and I left hospital feeling really confident, elated actually. I was really buzzing. It felt great. I believed all my problems were solved. I believed everything was going to work out for me. However, after only a matter of weeks, things changed

dramatically. Almost as suddenly as I had gotten all this self-belief, it went. Suddenly my mood took an extreme drop. I ended up in hospital again but I was only there for 4 days. On the fourth day, I jumped out of a hospital window trying to end my life. I woke up about 3 days later in the general hospital with a broken arm and badly damaged knee. I had shattered the bones in my ankles and had several other injuries. I was unable to walk for about 5 weeks. I eventually got physically well enough to leave and go home 7 weeks later.

Soon after this, I decided to see a counsellor. I found it very difficult at the start to talk about my thoughts and feelings. However, over time this became easier. I learned a lot about myself during this time. I found visiting the counsellor to be extremely beneficial. It was my counsellor who told me about GROW Mental Health support groups.

I did not know anything about GROW really. So one day I went to see Tess, the local GROW Support Worker. She encouraged me to come along to a meeting. She advised me to stick with it for a few weeks to check it out. My first impression of the group was that it was a caring and understanding group of people. Members gave good and sensible advice to each other. Each week someone tells their personal story.

Every week each member chooses a task to complete for the following week. It's a bit like a personal goal to aim for each week. I think the idea of getting a practical task is a good thing. It gives you motivation and determination, a kind of pressure, but a good

pressure to do something positive for yourself.

The fact that I could still get up or do something no matter how bad I was feeling really opened my eyes and made me realise there was always hope.

Anthony's Tips

- The stigma of suffering from a mental health problem was a huge issue for me. Over time, as I began to accept myself, the stigma faded. I believe that taking control of my own recovery and improving my Personal Value helped me a great deal with this issue.
- The hardest decision to make is to admit that you need help. But it could be the best decision you will make. It was for me.
- Sometimes looking for help can be a scary experience. If you are visiting a doctor for the first time, it might be an idea to bring a trusted friend along for moral support.
- Hold on to a piece of knowledge or wisdom that gives you strength. At my lowest point, I felt like I was going through my own personal hell. I got strength from a Winston Churchill quote, "If you're going through hell, keep going."

For more personal stories of recovery visit **GROW's website** at www.grow.ie

For more information about mental health visit www.letsomeoneknow.ie OR www.yourmentalhealth.ie

Concerned About Suicide

More information available from
www.healthpromotion.ie

Some Warning Signs:

Most people who feel suicidal don't really want to die, they just want to end their pain. These are some of the signs which may indicate that someone is having thoughts of suicide:

- Engaging in deliberate self-harm
- Talking about suicide
- Becoming isolated
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Sudden changes in mood and behaviour.
- Making 'final' arrangements.

Some Associated Risk Factors:

- Access to a method of suicide such as harmful medication or a firearm
- Loss of someone close such as a family member
- Impulsiveness and risk-taking behaviour
- Relationship or family break-up.

How to Respond:

- Show you care by offering support, for example say something like: "I'm worried about you and I want to help."
- Don't shy away from the subject, if you are concerned that someone is acutely suicidal find out by asking them if they have plans to harm themselves

- Get help or encourage them to get help, for example by saying "I will stay with you until you can get help."

There are a wide range of supports and services that can help in a crisis, including:

- The local GP or family doctor.
- GP out-of-hours services
- Accident and emergency departments of general hospitals
- Voluntary support services such as
Samaritans, Telephone: 1850 60 90 90
Teenline, Telephone: 1800 833 634
Childline, Telephone: 1800 66 66 66

Depression by Mary

My first dealings with depression began very slowly and gradually when I was in transition year of school. In "TY", while everyone was growing in confidence and making new friends, I was becoming more introverted and had very low self-esteem. As an outsider looking in, you would never suspect or believe anything was wrong with me. By the time I was in 5th year, I had no friends inside or outside school. I just wanted to be in the safety of my own home with my parents. I had a constant sick feeling in my stomach, had no appetite and was slowly losing weight.



I felt so alone and scared. My parents believed it was due to school. I used to overcome how I was feeling by studying all the time. I remember as if it was only yesterday, lying on my bed at night wishing that there were some way out. I just wanted to die. I got so used to feeling this way that I thought it was normal and it would be like this forever.

What finally led my parents bringing me to the GP was when I was doing a beautician course after my Leaving Cert. It was here my

depression was at its worst. I began being bullied by 2 people in the class. They were both mature women in their 30's and 40's. They were psychologically bullying me by excluding me from the class and making up stories about me. I was once again isolated and without a friend. I remember falling down crying in a corner of my bedroom and thinking of ways I could end my life. I began self-harming and lost loads of weight. I was hardly eating. I was only 6 stone, which was very little considering I am 5ft 6in. The worst thing was the principal and teachers of the college knew about what was happening but did nothing to help.

My parents brought me to the GP who prescribed me anti-depressants and referred me to a psychiatrist in a Dublin hospital. My appointment to see the psychiatrist wasn't for a few months. I continued at college even though it was a big struggle for me as my mood was still very low and I had little energy or interest in life. I felt very guilty about the impact the depression was having on my family. I eventually saw the psychiatrist who adjusted the medication and this lifted the depression.

Even though my depression was lifted, I believed that medication alone was not good enough in the recovery of depression. I believed that a combination of therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy and programmes that build on your confidence and self-esteem were needed. However, waiting lists were so over-crowded, that there was little chance of me receiving this help. It was as a result of this that I was determined to find the help myself. I began looking on the Internet and found GROW Mental Health. GROW has played and is playing a major role in my recovery from depression.

Before attending GROW meetings, I wanted to be better instantly. Now, I know that you can't put a time on recovery and that sometimes you have to be a bit selfish and love yourself a bit more. I used to isolate myself and believed I was completely worthless but now I actually put what my psychologist says into practice. I would never go into a group of people but I am now willing to take risks.

Just belonging to a group and being accepted by a group means more to me than you can ever imagine. Listening to people who have similar stories to me, gives me strength and confidence.

Mary's Tips

- I have learned that depression is unique to everyone and that everyone deals with it differently - but nobody can do it alone.
- I would advise to keep fighting on the road to your recovery - "no one is a no-hoper."
- "If the rough road gets you there and the smooth one doesn't, which are you going to choose?"

Depression

We all feel fed up, miserable or sad from time to time. These feelings don't usually last longer than a few days or a week, and they don't interfere too much with our lives. Sometimes there's a reason, but sometimes these feelings just come out of the blue. We usually cope with them ourselves. We may have a chat with a friend but don't otherwise need any help.

You may be depressed, or experiencing depression, when:

- the symptoms of depression last for two weeks or more, and
- the symptoms interfere with your everyday life.

Symptoms of depression include:

- feelings of sadness or hopelessness,
- difficulty with daily activities,
- difficulty concentrating, and
- changes in sleeping or eating patterns.

Depression can occur from a young age or can come late in life. It can also be associated with physical health problems or negative experiences. The symptoms of depression, regardless of your life stage or circumstances, should be taken seriously and never dismissed as 'understandable'.

The feeling of depression is much more powerful and unpleasant than the short episodes of unhappiness that we all experience from time to time. Due to the length of time it lasts and its impact on your life and relationships, you need to get help for depression as soon as possible.

For more information about mental health visit
www.letsomeoneknow.ie OR www.yourmentalhealth.ie

Bullying by Tom

Bullying started for me when I was about 7 years old. In Primary School my classmates used to pin me up against the wall and kick my legs. While doing this they would laugh at me. This really affected my confidence. Luckily it stopped when I went to Secondary School.

However after Secondary School I began to get bullied when I started working in a new job. This time the bullying was verbal. I was continually mocked with put-downs by some of the people in work including my supervisor. Even though it wasn't physical bullying, to me it felt equally as bad. I believe I was picked on because I was shy and quiet. I had low self-confidence because I suffered with dyslexia from an early age. I was an easy target.

One day I went to the manager to tell him what was going on and how it was affecting me. He laughed at me and said that the supervisor could do what he wanted. He said it was none of his business.

This didn't help me at all. It made me feel more isolated. I really wanted to leave the job but I stayed on. The bullying continued. It actually got worse as they had more ammunition to bully me. I felt really depressed and lonely. I felt like I had nobody to turn to. I was afraid that I would be laughed at again. I started to have suicidal thoughts. I wanted to end my pain whatever way I could. Eventually I left the job but it still affected me. I decided to see a counsellor which helped. I was advised to attend a GROW Mental Health support group. This really helped as I realised that I wasn't alone and that there was help out there. Listening to similar

stories from other people was comforting. After a while I told my story as well which gave me a great boost in confidence.

Tom's Tips

- Don't bottle up issues
- Do talk about with someone you can trust
- Try to get help as early as possible
- Just because you're being bullied doesn't mean you're weak.

Bullying by Colm

National school was ok up until 5th and 6th class. I had a bully of a schoolteacher who belittled me in front of the class. She did this because I sometimes wouldn't have my homework done. I used to spend hours every evening trying to get my homework done. I was so scared of her.

She would often belittle me and other students in the classroom, saying that we were dumb and stupid. I was around 11 or 12 years of age when this happened. I hated school at this stage and started to feel angry in myself and angry with my parents for sending me to school. When I started secondary school, I hated it because I hated the teachers. I was very shy, quiet and full of fear. I felt I just didn't fit in. I was slagged off sometimes. I was made fun of by some other students. Most students were going to youth clubs and playing sports. I would never go because I was shy and would only be slagged. I felt like crap and at the age of 15, I often thought of suicide. I wished I were dead.

At 19, I went to Agricultural College and got my green cert. For the next while, I worked in a car wash and did tyre fitting. During this period, I was suffering from depression and acute anxiety. I was suffering from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, which was diagnosed by my doctor.

A day didn't go by that I wouldn't think of suicide. I hated everything about myself. I went to see doctors and they put me on Prozac. I soon went off it and really didn't have much faith in the health services.

Then my mother told me about a local GROW Mental Health support group. My first impressions were that I had finally found people that I had something in common with. I could really talk to them about my problems without being judged. They helped me along the way with advice from their own experiences, which was a great help. I know now that I am not alone in the world. I have something in common with other people that understand me and who are good friends and care for each other.

Colm's Tips

- It's good to talk out your problems with people who want to listen and help the best way they can. -Say something nice about yourself.
- It's important to be active and outgoing - the more you get involved in activities, the easier it becomes.
- Try not to over-analyse the past or the future - live one day at a time.

Bullying

Bullying is common in Ireland, especially at school. The problem is, if you are being bullied, it can be hard to talk about it. But this is what has to happen! It's not your fault it started but you can do something to stop it.

Telling a parent, a teacher, a youth/sports group leader or someone in a position of authority who can help, is very important. If you find it too difficult or you're frightened, ask a friend to support you and be with you when you talk about the bullying. There are differences in how boys and girls bully. It's more common for boys to do something physical e.g. fighting, stealing, name calling and breaking things while it's common for girls to use psychological pressure like giving someone the 'silent treatment' or texting/cyber bullying.



Are you being bullied now?

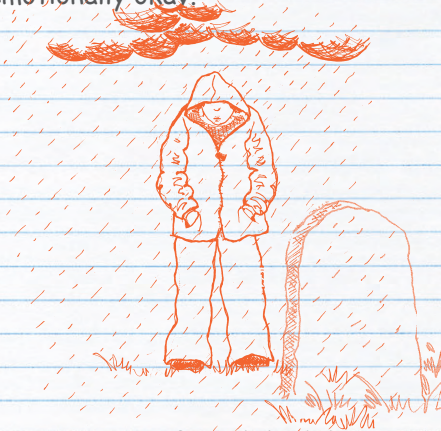
If you're already being bullied, number one action is to talk to someone. Most schools, colleges and workplaces have guidelines to stop bullying.

- Believe in yourself. Don't believe what the bully says of you. You know that it is not true.
- The difficulty lies with the bully not you and help is available to stop it.
- Try not to show that the bully has upset you - they may become bored with getting no reaction from you and stop.
- If you are a victim of cyber or text bullying, don't reply. Just make sure you tell someone what's going on.

For more information about mental health visit
www.letsomeoneknow.ie OR www.yourmentalhealth.ie

Bereavement by Alan

From the age of 16 I had experienced depression and anxiety regularly. I also experienced some bullying. I used to drink alcohol occasionally to overcome these feelings. Overall though, I felt mentally and emotionally okay.



However, last year my best friend died due to suicide. After the suicide, things went downhill pretty much straight away. I immediately started feeling very guilty about it and had loads of self-blame. These thoughts started taking over my life. Added to this I had the normal feelings of sadness and loneliness because of losing a friend. These feelings of guilt and self-blame are still very strong today.

Eventually I sought help from a counsellor. This helped me to understand and come to terms with different elements involved in suicide. I found it very useful to talk about the issue and also to understand it a bit better. It really helped.

I also started attending a local GROW Mental Health weekly support group. This helped me to focus on my own mental health. I was advised by the group to get back to keeping active. I used

to be involved in sports and go to the gym regularly. I stopped doing this after losing my friend. This task may seem very small but it helped me loads. It stopped me from isolating myself. It's definitely working.

At the time I felt I was the only one going through these feelings. Now I know that a lot of people battle with feelings of guilt but, with help, they eventually begin to turn things around. I'm one of those people.

Alan's tips

- Don't hide away
- Talk to a counsellor if you find it hard to talk to friends
- Check out local support groups
- Gather info from the internet - use trusted websites

Bereavement

Losing someone close to you, whether it's a friend or family member, is really hard to cope with. It's especially shocking when you're young and if this is your first close experience of death. We all can react very differently, especially in what we look for from others.

Some of us need to have people close because they feel it's the best help you can get. Others don't want everyone getting in their face and want to work it out for themselves. Or it may happen that your real feelings don't come out until much later.

However you react, death changes you and it can push you to see your life in different ways. Not everyone sees it simply as depressing - it can make you realise that life is short you just need to make the most of it. Or you may find that the shock of it stops your life in its tracks. You can't even be bothered to do your make-up, you lose interest in everything around you.

You may also be confused at how your feelings change over time. Everyone grieves differently and you shouldn't feel guilty if you're ready to move on, or angry if someone else in your family is still more visibly affected.

Remember that even though you'll never forget, in time you will be able to let go without feeling disloyal or guilty. Just give yourself time.

Share your feelings with family and close friends if and when you feel ready. Remember they are probably feeling the same even though they may not show it. It is true that a problem shared is a problem halved and in talking to others you not only will feel

better, you will help them to feel better too.

If you are struggling to come to terms with the death of someone who died by suicide contact:

Console

Telephone: 1800 201 890

Website: www.console.ie

For more information about mental health visit
www.letsomeoneknow.ie OR www.yourmentalhealth.ie

Bi-Polar by David

It all started for me from being in situations which would put me under a lot of pressure. I would become elated, confused and paranoid. Things which I could do before became harder to achieve. I would set my personal goals and standards up so high that before I reached them I would have a break down.

During College I went to America for a summer and while I was there I worked long hours in a labour intensive job. I worked 12 hour shifts. This eventually caught up to me and one night when I was trying to sleep I thought I heard noises outside and thought someone was trying to break in. As the night drew on I had become so confused. I thought I was being possessed by evil spirits. I didn't sleep that night and started the morning as if nothing had happened. I was losing my mental health but I was the last person to know it.

Because I couldn't see the signs of myself slipping I was unable to prevent my breakdown. People around me were unaware because I hid as much as I could. Eventually a lot more people started to see as it became more obvious. I began laughing out of place and making strange gestures and facial expressions. My family were hurt by this very much as they tried to get me to go to hospital. I refused and the doctors could not commit me unless I was a harm to myself or to others. This was a horrible scenario especially for my family. Eventually I did decide to go to hospital.

At first I denied the fact that anything was wrong with me. No one wants to admit they have faults. Eventually after not taking my medication and being hospitalised again, I grew to accept my illness. I matured as a person with Bi-Polar. Everything seemed a lot clearer after that. I became a healthier person physically and mentally with the help of a good lifestyle and compliance with medication.

After hospital I started attending my local GROW Mental Health support group. I found it useful to talk about the problems I was dealing with other people. I have even gone back into hospital to tell my story at an information session for patients.

Now I am not as scared as I was before. I am more open about myself and my feelings. I don't hide from the truth and I discuss my problems with the right people. I discuss my difficulties openly with medical staff. I take my medication regularly. I listen to people's views on my health but have learnt over time that although all are caring comments only few are right. I listen to myself first and seek guidance and support when needed. I am able to identify early symptoms now and act accordingly.

David's Tips

- Sometimes you can't trust all your thoughts and emotions no matter how real they seem - go by what you know, if in doubt ask for advice.
- Talk openly with the right people.
- Take your medication if your doctor prescribes it without medication you might slip into your own world.
- Try and keep a positive attitude - things will improve slowly but surely with help and support.

For more personal stories of recovery visit GROW's website at www.grow.ie

Bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder used to be called 'manic depression'. As the name suggests, it is characterised by mood swings - or episodes - that are beyond what most people experience in their lives, although they can also be subtle and gradual.

With bipolar disorder, moods can swing between low, high and mixed.



A low mood involves feelings of intense depression and despair. This is known as a depression and symptoms include those listed above.

A high mood involves feelings of elation. This is also known as mania or a manic period. Symptoms include impaired judgement, over-spending, too much energy and little need for sleep, anger or irritability and unrealistic beliefs in one's own abilities.

A mixed mood involves, for example, depressed mood with the restlessness and overactivity of a manic episode. People usually experience both depressive and manic episodes, but some will have only manic episodes.

Bipolar disorder affects about one in every 100 adults. It can start at any time during or after the teenage years, although it is unusual for it to start after the age of 40. Men and women are affected equally.

For more info about mental health visit www.letsomeoneknow.ie OR www.yourmentalhealth.ie

Family Problems by Amy

Family problems became a difficulty for me at the age of 13. My relationship with my Mum deteriorated about this time. The problems started when my Mum's partner moved into the family home. My parents split up a few years earlier when I was 8. We were still living in the same house but we barely talked. I couldn't accept any affection from her.

I was under a lot of stress and my school work suffered. I had no motivation or concentration. I was prescribed anti-depressants when I was 17. My Mum caught me taking aerosols and took me to the doctor. I stopped taking the anti-depressants after 6 months as I didn't feel they were helping. I had been saving them up and was thinking of taking an overdose. But my mother found the tablets in time.

When I was 18 I left home and moved in with my Dad because I wasn't getting on with my Mum. During this time I didn't realise how my relationship with my Mum was affecting other areas of my life. I felt really angry with her. This anger clouded my relationship with her and also with other people in my life. Even though I missed her, the anger was so strong that I didn't feel like I missed her at all.

However, the anger I had crossed over into other areas of my life. I had difficulties relating to other people and had a real problem regulating my emotions and dealing with certain situations. One day I became very aware of not being able to make eye contact with people. I found it very difficult to look people in the eye. A friend of mine actually became very annoyed by this and

I ended up losing that friendship because of it. Around the same time, I was with a group of my friends and I suddenly became very silent and was unable to speak. It was very distressing.

At the time I felt worthless, inadequate and scared. I was paranoid that people were thinking these same thoughts about me. I felt really isolated and alone. I couldn't communicate with anyone. I felt I was going silently insane. After many ups and downs, I eventually got in touch with a psychiatrist to talk about my problems. I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder and prescribed medication. My psychiatrist says that I won't be on tablets forever. She is very good and I'm able to talk to her openly about everything.

After this I started taking baby steps towards recovery. I began to challenge my negative feelings about myself. I started writing down how I was feeling and what I thought others were thinking about me. It was easier for me to write these thoughts down and show them to someone I trusted than to tell it one-to-one or face-to-face.

Things are getting better now. I'm still in regular contact with my psychiatrist. I also attend my local GROW Mental Health support group. This keeps me in touch with people who understand. They all suffer from mental health issues and it's great to be able to talk openly and safely on at the weekly meetings. Nobody is sitting there judging you. You can also help other people because of your experience.

As well as attending GROW meetings, I also use the website, SpunOut.ie, which provides support and advocacy opportunities to young people throughout the country. I'm also back studying. I'm now studying Psychology & Social Care. With further study I eventually hope to become a counsellor.

I still have the tendency to get panicky and anxious sometimes. What makes me most anxious is when I'm on my own a lot or just not thinking right. I find it hard to pinpoint but I'm getting better at managing it.

When you're going through mental health issues, it's like being pushed into a rose bush. It really hurts. When you're coming out of it, you still feel some pain, but at least you're on the way out.

Amy's Tips

- Look for help as early as possible
- Try to challenge your negative thinking with positive thinking - it takes practise but it's worth it.
- Write down how you feel - unknown stuff might come up sometimes but that's ok.
- Use online support if you find it difficult to talk - Make sure it's a trusted website. (Spunout.ie is a good starting point to find support sites).
- Challenge yourself to reach out for help to even one person - you may be helping them too.

For more personal stories of recovery visit GROW's website at www.grow.ie

Family

A bad atmosphere at home is very stressful to live with, even if there's no actual physical or sexual abuse. Every family argues about something, whether it's money, clothes, staying out too late or getting in trouble at school. Triggers for fighting can be as simple as arguing over the remote control. But arguments can be very upsetting and interfere with your school or college work. You may also feel pressure over being expected to live up to your parents' high expectations - to live their dream. Or you may think they try to control your life too much and break your trust, by reading your private text messages for example.

Unfortunately it's also more and more common for families to break up altogether. This is even harder if you're placed in the position of having to pick who you live with.

It doesn't matter what sort of family you have and whether you love them or they wreck your head, family is an important part of our lives.

Visit www.teenbetween.ie
for more info on dealing with family issues.
For more information about mental health visit
www.letsomeoneknow.ie OR www.yourmentalhealth.ie



Anxiety by Matthew

I've always had an anxious personality, but when I started college a couple of years ago it turned into a real problem. I don't know how it started, but I began to feel more and more uncomfortable in public situations. I had panic attacks sometimes, and I was afraid that if I had an attack in front of other people, I would completely embarrass myself. This stopped me from doing the things I should have been doing, like going to classes and meeting with friends. I was afraid to talk about this problem, even with the people I trusted most.

Once I had to meet with my tutor in college to discuss repeating a year. I felt very jittery during the couple of hours before the meeting. I felt ashamed about my anxiety problems, and about needing to repeat the year at all. On my way to my tutor's office, I noticed that my hands were shaking, and this completely freaked me out. I felt like I couldn't breathe. I started thinking that all this would be really noticeable, and was worried about how my tutor would react if I had a panic attack in his office. In the end I just couldn't face it, and went home. I ended up putting off that meeting for a long time.

My anxiety problems eventually became too obvious to hide, and I was surprised how much better I felt when I finally talked about everything with some close friends. I followed their advice to seek help from a professional, and soon found a psychiatrist who I'm very satisfied with. A few months after that I also joined a support group. Talking about my problems with people who had experienced something similar was really helpful.

Matthew's tips

- Find someone you can talk to about your worries
- If you think you might have a problem with anxiety, don't wait until it gets serious before you seek help.
- If a problem seems too big to solve, try to break it down into smaller parts and work on the bits you can do.
- Try not to let things escalate in your head.

Anxiety by Dave

Anxiety began for me when I started college. I started to feel withdrawn not interested in finishing. Normally I would always finish what I started.

The trigger was in part due to being interested in someone from class. I got really infatuated. I made myself become too intense about this person and self-harmed myself. It was during my time there that I started to feel people were talking about me after I texted this person with the love word. Towards the end of the year the pressure got to me. I tried to complete the course but I couldn't, so I walked.

I became uninterested in contacting people. I spent a lot of the time in bed watching TV until 3am in the morning. It was through my family that they suggested that I see a psychiatrist. So I went along to one they recommended. I found her welcoming and friendly. She made me feel at ease with myself and told me I had depression and put me on medication.

My anxiety still continued. Around this time, I went on a holiday

for a week and I got severe episodes of cold sweats while I slept with heightened anxiety and paranoia. I had real difficulty relaxing. Everything felt so surreal and at one stage I thought I was a setup for a TV show.

I continued to have delusions for a number of months. I felt really uncomfortable, even around my family. It took a lot of patience and time, with the help of my doctor and medication, to move to a more normal lifestyle. It was like learning to walk again.

I went to my first GROW Mental Health support group meeting around this time. My first impressions were one of a calm atmosphere, welcoming, no pressure put on you.

As the weeks went by I learned a lot about my mental health and how to be more objective about things. I've had a lot of ups and downs since I started in GROW but I definitely feel wiser and better able to deal with whatever life has to throw at me.

Dave's Tips

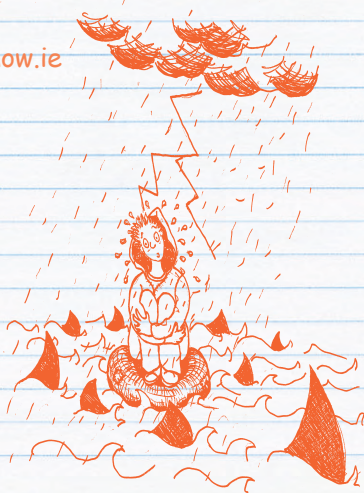
- Try to talk about your problems with a trusted friend.
- Try to have a structure to your week -when you have mental health difficulties a proper healthy routine often goes out the window.
- If you feel uncomfortable talking about your problems to a friend, try to talk to a doctor or counsellor - I found it really helpful.
- Try to find out what is causing you to feel the way you do - discussing things with your doctor or counsellor can achieve this.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a common experience for everyone. Depending on the type and severity of anxiety, it can have a damaging impact on your quality of life. For some, anxiety can be a passing emotion attached to stressful situations such as exams, social situations or major life events. For others, it is more than this. The signs associated with anxiety include a racing heart, rapid breathing, feelings of panic, sweating, excessive and undue worrying, disturbed sleep, tense muscles, morbid thoughts and fear of going mad.

Although in some instances your anxiety may have no apparent cause, people who are considered most 'at risk' of developing an anxiety disorder include those who have undergone a major life event such as bereavement, a relationship break-up or unemployment; those who misuse drugs and alcohol; or those with a family history of anxiety.

For more information about mental health visit www.yourmentalhealth.ie
Or www.letsomeoneknow.ie



Drug Use by Paul

My story is about the effects that recreational drugs had on my mental health. I always thought that a drug problem meant that you had to be addicted to drugs. I never had any addiction, but social drug use really had a negative effect on me. That's why I think it's important to tell my story to others.

After secondary school I got a place studying science at university. At this time I began to smoke cannabis socially with my friends and classmates. All my friends were smoking it and it didn't seem to have any negative effect on them. I also used to go clubbing and took Ecstasy and Speed a few times. I didn't think there was a problem.

However, over time, smoking cannabis began to make me feel very uncomfortable and out of place. I began thinking that my friends were talking about me behind my back. It wasn't long before I started to have panic attacks at college. Soon going to college became something that I dreaded.

Stupidly I continued smoking as I didn't want my friends to think that there was anything wrong with me but this only made things worse. The more I smoked, the more uncomfortable I got, and the more uncomfortable I got, the more I would go in on myself and isolate myself from reality. I spent less time interacting with other people unless it was absolutely necessary.

I dreaded having to leave the house everyday as I felt very self-conscious in public. I felt like my mind was going a million miles an hour. I didn't mingle with my classmates for more than a few minutes at a time and would spend my lunchtimes locked in the toilets as I was petrified of having to interact with people.

Eventually it got too much for me and I had a breakdown. I went to the doctor and was admitted to hospital as soon as my exams were over. I spent about 6 weeks in hospital. In a way it was good because I needed a break from everything. I was put on anti-depressants which helped a great deal. For the first time in a long time my mind cleared up a bit.

However my time spent trying to fight my symptoms had taken its toll on me. It seemed as if I had run out of energy and my will to get on with life was very low. I had a lack of confidence in my ability to make decisions. I stopped thinking positively about my future as I felt that my symptoms would always be with me no matter what I tried to do. I felt lonely and depressed. I constantly had suicidal thoughts. It was very tough at the time.

One day I picked up a leaflet about a local GROW Mental Health support group. I instantly became determined to go to a meeting as I knew I needed to gain some control of my mental health.

I have to say I felt very nervous in the first few meetings as I was among people I did not know and I felt quite panicky. However, I knew that I didn't have to put up a front about my problems anymore and that I could be open and honest about my mental health problems without being ridiculed. I attend the support meetings every week and I feel like I have totally recovered from my breakdown.

Paul's Tips

- You don't have to be addicted to drugs or drink for it to be a problem.....If it gives you negative side-effects then it is already a problem.
- Don't feel under pressure to take drugs. If you feel uncomfortable, it's ok to say no.
- Do talk to someone you can trust if you feel anxious, distressed or suicidal.
- It's ok to talk to a G.P. or Counselor. You'd be surprised how understanding they can be.

DRUGS & ALCOHOL

You may have some idea of the effects street drugs can have on your physical health. But are you aware of the effects they can have on your mental health?

It's possible that using street drugs may trigger off mental health problems which lurk under the surface. Drugs can also aggravate problems like depression or anxiety. They can also create mental health difficulties where there didn't appear to be problems before.

You might think that experimenting with alcohol or using drugs occasionally will not affect your long-term mental health. But sometimes just a one-off experience can result in problems. If you drink alcohol regularly or use drugs regularly then the risk is much higher. Everybody is different so using drugs or drinking alcohol may affect you in different ways to others.

The irony is that most people drink or take drugs to get a 'high' and to feel good. But the flip side is that these drugs can also cause the opposite states of nervousness, anxiety, paranoia and depression. In extreme cases drugs can even cause temporary paranoid psychosis.

It is better to look at what's causing you to want to take drugs or drink alcohol and consider is it worth it for a short term high. Remember if you take drugs or drink alcohol to feel better when the effects wear off the reasons you did it will still be there. It is important to safeguard your physical and mental health so try to put off drinking alcohol for as long as possible, and of course

taking illicit drugs should be avoided at all costs - the long term risks to your mental health as well as your physical health are too high.

Check out www.yourdrinking.ie and www.drugs.ie for more information.

For more information about mental health visit www.letsomeoneknow.ie OR www.yourmentalhealth.ie



Minding Your Mental Health

Below are some useful tips on minding your mental health. (Remember, maintaining good mental health on a regular basis makes it easier to deal with bigger problems when they occur)

1. Accept yourself

We're all different, but the one thing we have in common is that none of us is perfect. Many different things, including our background, race, gender, religion and sexuality, make us who we are. Everyone has something to offer and everyone is entitled to respect, including you. Try not to be too hard on yourself.

2. Get involved

Meeting people and getting involved in new things can make all the difference for you and for others. Join a club, meet up with friends, do a course there are many things to do if you look around. Not only will you feel better, but you will benefit from supporting others too.

3. Keep active

Regular exercise can really help to give your mental health a boost. Find something you enjoy sport, swimming, walking, dancing or cycling and then just do it. It may be hard work, but it is worth the effort. Regular exercise can help you feel more positive.

4. Eat healthily

Having a balanced diet will not only help the way you feel, but it will also help the way you think. Try to eat regularly and aim to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Good food is essential for your mind and body to work properly.

5. Keep in contact

You don't have to be strong and struggle on alone. Friends are important, especially at difficult times, so it is good to keep up contact with them.



6. Relax

If too much busyness is getting you down, make time to relax. Fit things into your day that help you unwind, like listening to music, reading or watching films. Find something that you enjoy and that will work for you.

Even 10 minutes of downtime during a busy day can make all the difference and help you manage stress better.

7. Do something creative

All kinds of creative things can help when you are anxious or low. They can also increase your confidence. Music, writing, painting, poetry, cooking, gardening experiment until you find something that suits you.



8. Don't binge drink

Drinking alcohol to deal with problems will only make things worse. It is best to drink in a safe way, in moderation and avoid binge-drinking. Overdoing it can damage your health and won't help you to deal with the cause of

your worries. Alcohol is a depressant and overdoing it can increase anxiety and lead to depression.

9. Talk about it

Many of us can feel isolated and overwhelmed by problems sometimes. Talking about how you feel will help. Confide in someone you trust and if you feel there is nobody to talk to, call a helpline such as the one run by the Samaritans - 1850 60 90 90.

10. Ask for help

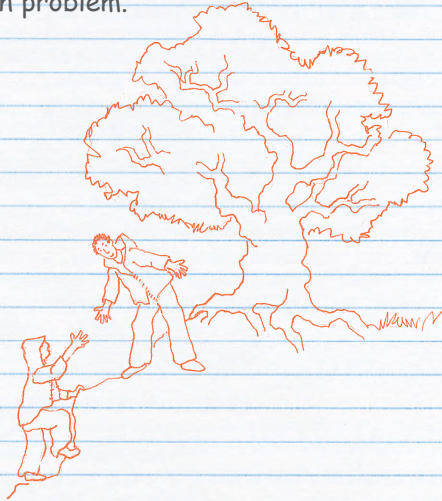
If you were feeling physically sick you would see a doctor, so don't be embarrassed about getting help for your mental health. Everyone needs help from time to time and there is nothing wrong with asking for it. In fact, asking for help is a sign of personal strength.

Remember Keep active!



Look out for others

Problems with friends or family, work or school as well as normal everyday stress can make you over-sensitive, irritable, lazy, withdrawn or rebellious. These feelings are normal and will usually pass, but if they don't go away they can be the symptoms of a mental health problem.



The following signs might indicate a mental health problem:

- Withdrawal from friends, family, school, work, sports or other things that are usually enjoyable
- A major change in mood or inappropriate responses to certain situations
- Disturbed sleep - either not getting enough or sleeping too much
- Disturbed eating patterns - either eating less than normal or over-eating
- Preoccupation and obsession about a particular issue

- Lack of care for personal appearance or personal responsibilities
- A drop in performance at work or school or in hobbies
- Doing things that don't make sense to others or hearing or seeing things that nobody else can hear or see

If you think that someone you know might be having problems, look out for the signs and symptoms listed and talk to them about it. Most people will turn to a friend for support during tough times, so being there for your friends can really help.

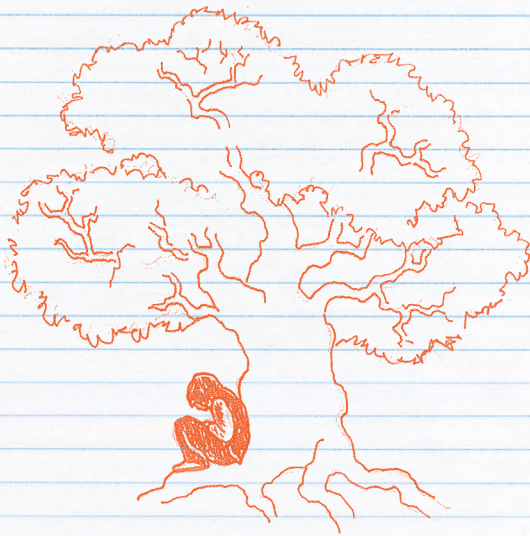
Look after yourself

Remember, it is important to look after your own mental health, so don't take on more than you feel comfortable with. Talk to someone about your concerns. You are not responsible for everyone else, but you can offer support. It can be a huge worry if someone tells you that they have thoughts of suicide. Sometimes they don't want you to tell anyone else, but you must explain to them that you can't keep this to yourself and that you can help them get the support they need. If someone confides in you, it means they are reaching out for help. If they didn't want help, they wouldn't have told you.

NEED HELP?

If you, or someone you know, is in crisis now and need someone to talk to:

- Contact your local doctor, listed under 'General Practitioners' in the *Golden Pages*
- Contact Samaritans on 1850 609090 (Republic of Ireland) or 08457 909090 (UK including Northern Ireland)
- Go to, or contact, the Accident and Emergency Department of your nearest general hospital
- Contact the emergency services by calling 999 or 112
- Check out the websites on the next page.



www.spunout.ie is an independent youth powered national charity working to empower young people to create personal and social change. Spunout is part funded by the HSE NOSP

www.headsup.ie is an automated 24hr text service set up to show young people where to get help

www.headstrong.ie is a national organisation working with communities to ensure that young people are better supported to achieve mental health and well being

www.belongto.org is an organisation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered young people. BelongTo is part funded by the HSE NOSP

www.bodywhys.ie is a national voluntary organisation providing a range of services for people affected by eating disorders

www.youth.ie is the organisation for voluntary youth work in Ireland

www.omcya.ie is the web site of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

www.dailnanog.ie is the national youth parliament of Ireland

www.youngsocialinnovators.ie is a national social awareness and active citizenship programme for young people. Young Social Innovators is part funded by the HSE NOSP

www.yourmentalhealth.ie aims to improve awareness and understanding of mental health in Ireland. The site is funded by HSE NOSP

www.pleasetalk.ie is a website which provides details of the support services available to students on college and university campuses. The site is funded by the HSE NOSP

www.reachout.com a support service for young people going through a tough time with information on the issues that matter to young people, signposts to other services and the opportunity to join a supportive online, mental health community

www.aware.ie is a national voluntary organisation providing support through depression

www.recovery-inc-ireland.ie is a national organisation which hosts weekly self-help groups for people dealing with mental health problems

www.shine.ie is the national organisation dedicated to upholding the rights and needs of all those affected by enduring mental illness

www.grow.ie helps people who have suffered, or are suffering from mental health problems

www.mentalhealthireland.ie is a national voluntary organisation which aims to promote mental health and support persons with a mental illness



letsomeoneknow.ie

- Look out for Yourself
- Common Problems
- Useful Links
- Create Your Action Diary
- How to Help a Friend

Visit
www.letsomeoneknow.ie
to find out more.



letsomeoneknow.ie

Useful Contact Details:

Notes:

Notes:

There are lots of other organisations which can give you advice in confidence. You can find their details here -

<http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie/>.

Remember
You Can Do It
But You Can't Do it Alone





World Community
Mental Health
Movement in Ireland

For more information about GROW contact:
Infoline: 1890 474 474
Email: info@grow.ie
www.grow.ie



letsomeoneknow.ie is a website which contains information, help and advice about the most common mental health issues that affect young people. This website has been developed as part of the Young Peoples Mental Health awareness campaign. The campaign and this website were initiated and funded by the HSE.

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