

**“Tell people, don’t hide it. Find people you trust, who will understand, and go from there.”**

I have been open about my illness as I am not ashamed of it – if someone has asked me, I have told them. I have always been open about my emotions. Some people have felt like they shouldn’t have asked, but I have sought to make them feel better for asking. I’ve been able to sit and talk to people, and I’ve had a positive response, with some people getting in touch later to say how much they’ve enjoyed our chat. That’s been helpful, because I don’t have to hide it. If I wasn’t honest, I’d have to lie – and I’d have to live with the fear of being accused of doing something wrong by being off sick. I already have had to manage so much in my head – if people react badly, that’s their issue.

When I became unwell for the second time, I went to my GP, who diagnosed depression and put me on a low dose of anti-depressants. I was referred back to Psychology, but it took a long time to sort out an appointment. I had to wait 6 months, and I think this extended my period of illness.

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I have wanted to get better, but I have not had the energy. The input from the psychologist has been important for putting things in perspective. My biggest problem has been my stammer - words scare me – and a lot of my issues have stemmed from my inability to convey what I want to say, when I want to say it. It’s a constant battle. It’s exhausting as I always have to think 3 or 4 sentences ahead, avoid certain words, or find alternatives. It’s disheartening if I’m forced to change what I want to say, as words have such power. It’s led me to hate myself, to feel like I’m always on the outside, and I can feel lonely even in a crowd. I tend to focus on the negative, even if something positive has happened, and I never celebrate my success.

My psychologist has helped in understanding all of this. Through working with her and through Cognitive Behavioural Therapy I am unravelling who I am. I have more understanding of the vicious cycle of anxiety and depression, and now I can step back and rationalise why I’m feeling and behaving in a certain way (like saying yes to everyone). I am now working on ways to manage things better – the thoughts will never go away, but I am better at accepting them and not going to such extremes.

**“My manager was very supportive when I told him, and I was able to be very open. It was like chatting to a friend.”**

When I was off work for 6 months, my manager would meet with me on a weekly basis. He kept me up to date with work, and he would reassure me, which helped with the guilt I felt for being off. He would text me regularly to see how I am, or to share some mental health information he’d come across. He was very supportive when I first told him, and I was able to be very open. It was like chatting to a friend. For him, the priority was for me to be healthy enough to come back to work. I came back on a phased return, and Human Resources and Occupational Therapy have been supportive, reinforcing all the procedures followed by my boss.

Just now, I have been reading books to learn more – such as *The Happiness Trap* and *Lost Connections*. I have started looking into Mindfulness. At the moment, I feel I am on autopilot and everything is bland. I am not taking anything on board – and this is difficult for someone who is used to dealing in extremes.

Nowadays mental health problems are starting to become more acceptable – people are more willing to understand and not just dismiss it. But the only way to understand depression is to experience it. People can relate to physical pain, but some people think, ‘What have you got to be depressed about?’

**“It’s important to know that depression is indiscriminate – it doesn’t care if you have the perfect life.”**

Social media has been positive in that there is more sharing and posting about mental health, and there is some great imagery which helps to portray how you really feel. When I was off there was some coverage of Neil Lennon. He is a very divisive figure in terms of being a football manager, but in reading about his mental health issues – he should be acknowledged for being brave. Mental health affects us all. His approach helped me be more open, especially around people I’m friends with who think lads are lads. They have not dismissed me – they have been understanding and approachable. It’s important to have someone who gives the message not to laugh, and that it’s ok to show that weakness.

If you are affected by any issues raised in this case study or are worried about someone, please contact the Samaritans on 116 123, Breathing Space on 0800 838587 or NHS 24 on 111. In an emergency call 999. For information about mental health and suicide, visit [www.suicidehelp.co.uk](http://www.suicidehelp.co.uk) or download the Suicide? Help! app by searching in your app store.