



“It’s OK not to be OK”



Mental health is a hot topic of conversation at the moment. We all have mental health; however, statistics show that 1 in 4 adults and 1 in 8 young people suffer from mental ill-health.

Unlike most physical ill-health, mental ill-health is not usually visible and it's worth remembering that, just because you cannot always visibly see a mental illness, it doesn't mean it's not there. Often, hidden behind a smile or other outward characteristic that someone may choose to show, the historical stigma that surrounds this kind of illness can mean that outwardly everything seems to be fine.

No matter what we look like, or what our background is, anyone at anytime can suffer from mental ill-health. Some people choose not to speak out, for fear of being judged or labelled as weak, and this can cause some people to suffer in silence. They worry that sharing their anxieties or feelings could be seen as wasting other people's time or that no one else will understand. Hiding behind an outward mask of normality is exhausting and can exacerbate a low level issue so that it becomes much more serious. That is why it is so important that we break down the stigma surrounding mental health matters and start normalising the conversation, so that

those struggling feel able to seek help at a much earlier stage. Speaking out is no weakness.

Anxiety is not something we can switch on or off whenever we feel like it. It is not something we can always control and it can certainly be a daily struggle. One thing we can do, though, is learn to develop strategies which enable us to cope with life's daily challenges and set achievable goals for ourselves. Just like individual mental health, individual strategies and goals will differ from person to person, so a goal can be something simple, such as making our bed, to socialising with friends or running a marathon! No matter how big or small a goal is, reaching it can bring a sense of achievement which can enhance our own wellbeing. And if we don't – there's no shame in it: we can try again tomorrow.

If you know someone that you think may be struggling, be prepared to intervene. You don't have to be qualified in mental health to show someone that you care. There are five simple steps:

- Approach the person
- Listen
- Communicate non-judgmentally
- Give support
- Encourage and signpost them to the professionals

The Grace Dear Trust is a mental health charity, set up after losing our daughter and sister, Grace, to suicide in February 2017, aged just 27. Our aim is to help save the lives of other young people suffering with mental health issues. Grace had been suffering with depression and anxiety from the age of 13, but hadn't felt she could reach out to anyone to help her.



We are raising awareness amongst children and young people, giving support to those who need it and preventing others from suffering so long in silence. We do this by raising money and funding schools to provide counselling for students in an environment that isn't intimidating.

We have been established as a charity for just over 18 months, and are proud to share that, since our inception we have raised in excess of £80,000! Looking back at how far we have come, it's been a busy time! All of the money we've raised is going back into our local community, to improve the provision of mental health support for young people.

Our support has already made a difference in our local community. We have pledged money to six secondary schools (Tolworth Girls' School, Southborough High School, Hinchley Wood School, Esher Church of England High School, Rosebery School and

Chessington School). We have been able to provide an extra counsellor, once a week for the year, at four of the schools, cutting the student waiting list down, and have also funded mental health first aid training for school staff. We have had some very positive feedback so we know the work we are doing is making a difference, and we will continue to help the young people in our community for as long as we can.

We've trained over 25 school staff in Mental Health First Aid, which equips them with the knowledge and skills to spot the signs that someone might need help, and the strategies they might use to make an effective early intervention. We have funded instructor training in Mental Health First Aid to two of our supporters so that, when schools request it, we can offer this crucial training to their staff promptly. We think by educating young people, encouraging them to talk about their feelings and making mental health an everyday topic of conversation we might just be that little bit closer to STOPPING SUICIDE!

With the help and support from our local community "together we are stronger" and can help promote and support young people's mental health.

Remember: "It's ok not to be ok"

