



Sixteen-year-old Danni (left) is hoping to become a psychologist  
Charlotte (above) wants teens to know they're not alone

Charlotte McKenzie\*\*, a 23-year-old student from Hampshire, feels the same way, and now campaigns for better services after becoming depressed as a teen. Since overcoming her problems, she's started speaking in schools to help tackle the stigma. "I try not to dwell on my past, other than to take it as a positive that I can help young people who have suffered like me," she says.

Charlotte was admitted to a teenage psychiatric unit aged 17, after attempting suicide. "At 14, I was diagnosed with ME, an illness that causes extreme fatigue, and I missed a lot of school. It left me feeling isolated, and I began self-harming and developed an eating disorder. My parents, Maureen, 50, and Nick, 52, could see I was unwell, but didn't know what to do," she says.

"When I was 17, I took an overdose and my parents decided to place me in a psychiatric unit. I was scared at first, but I met other teenagers there with similar problems, which made me feel less alone. I was diagnosed with psychotic depression, prescribed antidepressants and had psychiatric treatment for five months before I was discharged."

Charlotte's mum Maureen, a neuroscientist, says: "Mental health wasn't ever on my radar when raising my daughter. Looking back, I was naive. I'll never forget the pain of leaving her at the hospital. Nick and I felt so guilty - it's disempowering to accept you can't help your child.

"But I'm so proud of how far Charlotte has come - she's a happy and inspiring woman who wants to help others."

Five years on from leaving hospital, Charlotte is still taking medication and having therapy, but says: "Knowing I can assist young people in getting the support they need, and help them feel less alone or stigmatised by their condition, means a lot to me."

Katie is also looking forward to a healthier, happier future. "I'm training to be a nursery nurse, which I love, and I have a group of good friends who have stuck by me. It's good to feel I'm leading a 'normal' life," she says.

"Your teenage years are a hard time to have a mental illness. They're when you find out who you are and, for a long time, I thought I was nothing more than a mental health patient. But I don't want my illness to define me any more."

## REPORT

### SIGNS & SURVIVAL: A GUIDE FOR TEENAGERS AND PARENTS

#### What are the warning signs?

Mental health issues can manifest in many forms, and to varying degrees, but there are a few common warning signs that could reveal someone is suffering. "If you're a teenager, or a parent of a teenager, and you notice a number of the following symptoms - or any one of them to a severe extent - then seek professional help," says Chris Leaman from YoungMinds. "If you are thinking about self-harming, then seek professional help immediately."

- \* Not wanting to do things that you previously enjoyed - like a hobby, listening to music or going shopping.
- \* Sleeping more or less than normal.
- \* Eating more or less than normal.
- \* Feeling irritable, more easily angered than normal, upset, miserable or lonely, but not knowing why.
- \* Being self-critical.
- \* Having thoughts of hopelessness.
- \* Wanting to self-harm.
- \* Feeling tired and low on energy and motivation.
- \* Feeling frightened, nervous or panicky all the time for no apparent reason.

#### Parents' survival tips

If you're worried about your child's behaviour, try these ideas to help them without pushing them away.

- \* Make sure they know you love them and are proud of them, even when things are busy and stressful. Don't forget the power of a hug.
- \* All teenagers go through emotional stages, for example feeling anxious, angry or having tantrums. Let this happen, but stay aware. They may just be adapting to new feelings, but let them know you're concerned about them.
- \* If your child sees you're scared by their behaviour, it could frighten them even more. Teenagers need to know you're there to keep them safe.
- \* If it's hard to communicate with your child, sending a text or email can make the situation less awkward.
- \* Be honest about your feelings - you don't have to be perfect. Telling them that it's OK to make mistakes, shout or say unkind things sometimes, will take the pressure off you all.
- \* Ask your child what they think would help them - they often have good ideas about solving problems.
- \* If you can, speak to your partner or confide in a friend. This will not only provide you with support if things are getting you down, but they may see the situation differently, and offer new solutions.
- \* While it may be difficult, try to take time for yourself. Watching a DVD, cooking your favourite dinner or having a night out will help you gain perspective.
- If you or someone you know needs help, call the YoungMinds Parents' Helpline on 0808 802 5544, 9.30am-4pm weekdays; or visit [Youngminds.org.uk](http://Youngminds.org.uk)

25,000

The number of young people that are admitted to hospital every year due to self-harm injuries. Between one in 12 and one in 15 young people self-harm\*.

6%

of 16-24 year olds have attempted suicide in their lifetime. In 2011, 194 people aged 15-19 took their own lives\*.



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