

Adolescent Mental Health & Development
Personal Stories of Mental Health

Familiarization/initial comments	Data	Coding/identifying themes
	Lucy, January 27, 2020 I was diagnosed with anxiety when I was 15 and it's something I still struggle with today in my twenties. For a while now it seems like it's all I've known, and a big portion of my life has been either trying to hide it or desperately trying to find people that I can open up to that will be kind and give me the support I need. I dare say I've found those people. However, sometimes it feels like even those people don't care about me. The constant worrying that I'm not good enough, that no one will ever truly like me and want to spend time with me, the fear that my friends are only my friends out of sympathy. I still can't get rid of those intrusive thoughts. I think I've been lucky in terms of the people I have around me, my friends and family who listen on the odd chance I feel comfortable enough to speak about how I feel. There are, of course, people who don't understand, my dad being one of them, but that doesn't mean he doesn't mean well. I remember how he'd reference how he knew I had 'problems' but that doesn't mean I shouldn't try to do things. That always hurt, but with time he's become more patient with me. He'll never 'get it' though. My dad is one of the most confident and outgoing, extroverted people I know and that's why me telling him I just feel too anxious will never resonate with him; I got my worrying tendencies from my mum after all. But that's ok because he still tries and that's what matters. I used to get really upset about it but as I've grown up, we've learned to understand each other more even if he'll never quite know what my anxiety is. I wonder if he thought it was just teenage angst that would eventually go away. That's an attitude I've found to be quite prevalent	

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	now, as well as when I was younger, the kind of attitude that made me embarrassed to admit I was struggling. It's important to be kind, to listen, to believe those around you who reach out for help when it concerns a mental health issue like anxiety, let them know that you're on their side. You don't have to 'get it', what matters is that you want to learn, and you can be mindful of what you say and do. These small changes in attitude can affect someone more than you realise. Reference: Time to Change (2020, 9 November). It's hard to understand anxiety, but you can still support someone. https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/blog/its-hard-to-understand-anxiety-you-can-still-support-someone	
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	Teri, March 26, 2018 As I've gotten older, it's become more apparent to me that talking about mental health in the Black and Asian communities is still very much a taboo topic and hardly ever spoken about. Over the last several years, I have made it my mission to break the stigma of mental health issues, especially in these communities. There are people from both communities that seek help to manage their mental health issues but are not visible. What scares me is that if we don't communicate with each other about mental health issues, we will ultimately pass down the stigma to our younger generation and	

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	they may not feel comfortable or confident to talk about the mental health issues they may be facing. As a professional actress I am faced with a lot of highs and lows on a regular basis and it can get extremely taxing on my mental wellbeing. Over the years, I have built a good support network and knowledge to seek help when needed. Both can make a real difference to staying well on a day to day basis. Yet, a big question that still motivates me to take positive action today is: What can I do with what I know and have experienced that can give people from my community the knowledge and help to deal with these issues? Being open to change is key - no one should wait until something happens to their loved ones, for them to realise they could've done something to prevent it. Alongside acting I run 'Speak Up', an organisation that works with young people and adults supporting them with their mental health issues. "Man up!", "Cheer up!", "It will pass", "So many people have it worse than you" and "Don't be such a downer" were some trigger words and phrases young people and adults felt did a lot more damage than good to their mental health and wellbeing. Can you imagine hearing these words and phrases repeatedly and not feeling like you have that support you need? People with mental health issues, especially from the Black and Asian communities, are made to feel embarrassed or ashamed about what they are feeling and then in turn this allows their negative thoughts and feelings to grow. In the Black and Asian communities, I have noticed a lack of empathy for others when faced with mental health issues. Are we just too embarrassed to talk about these issues When I <u>talk</u> to <u>friends</u> about their mental health issues, they always say how empowered they feel after. We never know what someone else is going through until we communicate. Our varied and yet shared experiences can make a real	
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	difference to someone's life. We do not have to suffer alone or in silence. I do believe there is a shift that is happening within our communities. There are a growing number of forums and safe spaces like Speak Up, that give aid to people who are facing mental health difficulties. There is always room to do more and I will continue to make it my mission to be part of creating positive change to help break the stigma in the Black and Asian communities. I would also like to encourage community members that have been, or know someone, affected by mental health problems, to join this meaningful movement for change. For more information about what I'm doing, please visit Speak Up. Reference: Time to Change (2020, 9 November). Mental health in the Black community is still a taboo. https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/blog/mental-health-black-community-still-taboo	
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	Chloe, March 13, 2018 It is estimated that 4 in 100 people in the UK struggle with self-harm. It is one of the most common coping mechanisms for those suffering mental illnesses, yet it is still a taboo subject. Self-harm is when someone intentionally harms or injures themselves. It is often a way of coping with overwhelming thoughts and feelings, and is very misunderstood.	

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	It can be hard to understand what would cause someone to physically harm themselves. As someone who has self-harmed since I was 11 years old, I can still hardly comprehend why. I was hurting so much mentally and struggling so much with the many emotions I was feeling that it seemed like inflicting pain upon myself was the only way to cope'. It was a way of matching the pain I was having on the inside to the outside. The extent of shame upon myself is small in comparison to how ashamed I am of what other people may think of my actions. Will they think I'm crazy? That I need help? That I'm a 'psycho'? Before telling anyone about the way I was feeling, I was more worried about opening up about the self-harm. It petrifies me that anyone would see me as 'weak' or 'vulnerable'. Writing about this subject is extremely difficult, and the thought of being judged is what scares me most. In a media interview with a newspaper, they asked: do you think you self-harmed for attention? I can honestly say no. I don't hurt myself for attention. If I wanted attention, I wouldn't go to every length I do to ensure that my arms are never exposed. For me, it's a very personal and private thing. It was my way of dealing with things that no one else knew about. My self-harm journey is unspoken about. No one knows the extent of it and many are unaware I'd even done it. If I'm honest, the last thing I thought I'd talk about to such a large audience is self-injury. But I promised myself that I had to talk. To make other people realise they're not alone and help rid the taboo. To raise awareness for those who struggle to understand. To try and make a difference in a society that still don't take mental illness seriously. How can anyone else feel	
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	comfortable <u>talking about it</u> when I don't dare myself? if I can help just one person, then for me, my job is done. How can someone who has an amazing support system in her friends, family and school staff, who plays football every week for her home town, who has just accepted a scholarship in America, want to cause physical harm to themselves? This question, and others, I've heard before. However, it has never made me feel any better about myself. When you're in the depth of despair, under a never-ending storm cloud, overwhelmed with hundreds of emotions, it makes sense. I don't think I'll ever know why hurting myself was the one thing I resorted to. But one thing I know did help me, was finally talking about it. I waited a very long time to actually speak to anyone about what I was doing to my body. One of my biggest fears whilst in this dark place was disappointing the people I cared about most. It took a very long time for my <u>parents</u>, friends and family to come to terms with, and I don't think they'll ever fully understand. If I'm honest, I would never want them to understand the incredibly low self-esteem that makes you want to inflict your body with pain. Why would I? Talking about it with a <u>friend</u> that has been in the same position as me, through medical support, regular GP appointments, medication and one-to-one support from a <u>teacher</u>, I feel like this shameful secret I had, is easier to cope with. To this day, I refuse to wear short-sleeves. I'm worried about being asked questions, and people looking. I still feel shame somewhat, but I shouldn't. However, I do feel able to talk more openly about it and that for me, is massive. We need to get rid of the taboo around self-harm. It's a lot more common than you think and seeking help is a sign of strength, not	
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	weakness. It's by no means easy, but it is important to banish the stigma and the stereotypes around self-harm, and try and encourage empathy. Through raising awareness, it can educate not only young people, but society as a whole. We can't keep pretending and pushing it under the rug. We've got to talk about it. Reference: Time to Talk. (2020, 9 November). Talking about my self-harm helped me feel less ashamed. https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/blog/talking-about-my-self-harm-helped-me-feel-less-ashamed	
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