

Service user informed practice: Meeting the needs of young people with complex mental health profiles

A practitioner perspective

Jude Smit

Mental Health Advisor, Specialist Assessor,
Psychotherapist/Integrative Arts Psychotherapist

Context/The Bigger Picture

1 in 4 will experience mental health issues

Behind cancer it is the UK's biggest health concern

Most recent data available shows 1,180 students who experienced mental ill health left courses early in 2014-15, up 210% from 2009-10*

43% rise in YP asking for help because of anxiety

39% rise in YP seeking counselling for depression

Together we can make a difference

Planting a seed....

How do we work together to empower individuals

Learning from learners

Working in collaboration

Challenges

Case studies and vignettes

PhD research

Unless otherwise requested by the students, quotes, case studies and vignettes have been suitably anonymised – permission has been given to share the content included on these slides with delegates.

Learning from learners

All is not what it seems

Listen first

Living with isolation, fear, exposure

Difficulty communicating

Honest, open conversations

Involved in the process

Individualised – thinking outside the box – planning, rethinking, innovation

“Sometimes I feel small, like only the very smallest piece of a Russian doll. The outer shells are always smiling, even if I’m not.” Ella Baron <https://www.theguardian.com/education/gallery/2017/jun/27/eleven-sketches-university-mental-health-crisis>

Working together to empower young adults

Working with internal and external structures

Psychoeducation

Empathy not sympathy

Knowing you are on their side, but not taking sides

Multi-Disciplinary Team working

Input

Attending meetings - human interaction

Knowing your role in the MDT

Bridging

Advocating for the student

A 'united approach'

Building a team around the student

- Services – internal and external
- Teachers, café staff, LRC, security, wardens
- Modelling – similar ways of working, consistency, stability, containment
- Boundaries

Transitions

School to college

FE to HE

CAMHS to adult services

Bridging

Broken attachments and building relationships

"I have experienced general anxiety disorder for 5 Years now. I had no support and it was just emphasised and made worse but at the college the care makes me feel so welcomed and comfortable. I struggle with staying in class for a long amount of time and I was to panic I feel as though I need to go home.....

.....I am feeling really good today and on Friday my exam went really well and A answered all of the questions and felt so comfortable with the support I had." First year student

Challenges

Resource limits and limitations

Health vs education

Getting teaching staff on board

Impact on study

- impact on learning
- Impact on teaching

Not getting a full picture – joining up the dots

Whole college/university approach

Advocating for the student

“Before going to sleep I’d plan my whole day in five minute intervals. The routine helped counter the illogical nature of anxiety; it gave me something stable to follow.” EB

What is reasonable, manageable, within the limitations of the setting

Know:

- Limitations of the setting
- Resource limitations
- Own limitations

Managing expectations

- Own
- Others

Transparency: Be honest about limitations and involved the learner in the process

Know what is reasonable and realistic – get to know your college/university policies and structures

Sometimes difficult decisions at the time lead to positive changes later on

Exams

- Reasonable adjustments
- Creative adjustments

Working with extremes

- Know where to direct students
- Build networks/a strong team around you
- Know your own limitations
- Get support for yourself

Suicidality/ideation

- Visiting hospital, inpatients, day patient and outreach support
- Boundaries and roles
- CMHT
- Risk management

“Greater awareness of possible risk factors including so-called final straw stressors such as exam pressures and relationship problems by services, families and young people themselves can contribute to prevention of future deaths” Rodway, et.al. 2016

Managing returns

Restarters

Following a suicide attempt

Things to consider:

- Risk and review
- What information goes out to staff
- Reintegration
- Normalising
- Creating a support network
- “You have” not “you are”
- Keep communication channels open and fluid
- Managing fears, myths and preconceptions

‘It’s like the panic is so overwhelming there’s no room for anything else’ EB

When it doesn't work

Stress and impact – Point of no return

Being honest

Using the structures in place

Not feeling like you have to go it alone/sole responsibility

Team decisions – working closely together

Involving the YP – if possible helping them to make the decisions themselves

Understanding that sometimes there is no choice

Compassion for self

When it works – Case Study

What have been the biggest barriers/challenges being in college?

“Some of the biggest challenges that I've faced in college include attendance (this is often the most recurring one), pressures of performing consistently well throughout the year, communicating with teachers about my mental health and meeting deadlines. The UCAS process is also a difficult one; many students often struggle with this and find themselves doubting whether they are good enough to attend university.”

What specifically about the support you have received at college has made it more manageable to stay in college/access your studies?

*“The support I have been given at college has helped me immensely and has allowed me to make significant improvements in both my academic and personal life. Since the very start of college, I have been lucky enough to receive consistent, professional support and guidance which has allowed me to return and stay in college. I have been able to build a strong support system at college at my own pace and when in particular need, know that I can access help from all the members of the student support team.” **Third year student***

Self-care

Supporting each other

Self-supervision

Peer-supervision

Ask yourself what supports you?

Who supports you?

Referring on

Practising what we preach

Taking a break

Final comments and research

Unlock the potential of learners, who may have many obstacles along the way

5 elements to my working practice:

- Integrity
- Authenticity
- Transparency
- Empathy
- Safety

Research

A study into what we can learn about the lived experience of suicide attempts from young adults in post-16 education.

We are a small part of a student's life journey, but never underestimate the importance of your part.

Thank you for all that you do

Contact:

jsmit@esher.ac.uk

“Perhaps there is more understanding and beauty in life when the glaring sunlight is softened by the patterns of shadows.” Axline, V.