

A Young Person's Perspective - Eating Disorders

I've always been sort of prone to eating problems, because when I was very young I was quite overweight, so when I was about 14 I decided to start dieting. I think it was very much under control, my weight loss. I was really really happy with my weight and it was only when I was sort of coming up to 15 that the problems with the under-eating and bingeing and purging really started to kick in. Two of my best friends started dieting. For the past couple of years I'd been the little skinny one, and very quickly they began to look very similar to what I looked like, if not a little bit trimmer. I started getting quite self-conscious at that and I just remember it was one Easter and I ate an entire Easter egg (I love chocolate) and I just thought, I don't feel well. I went upstairs and I just tried to be sick, more for comfort rather than actually thinking 'I need to get rid of these calories' and I think it was just from then on I realised that if I did ever need to get rid of food, I could.

I used to go round my friends house for sleepovers. I'd be in the bathroom for two hours saying I had to like wash my hands and stuff, and I think they know what was going on but they didn't want to say anything. But it was just uncontrollable; everywhere I went I'd just eat loads and then be sick. I started off with Bulimia and when that didn't work I decided that not eating was the way forward and my formal diagnosis was Anorexia.

My Dad took me to the GP, they weighed me and for my height I was a very very healthy weight despite the fact that I wasn't eating anything practically. He just said sort of come back every couple of weeks and he kept setting me little challenges like, try and have a cereal bar, try and have a piece of toast for your breakfast. Just after Christmas 2013, my GP eventually wrote to CAHMS saying 'Ok, she is now underweight, she needs to be seen by someone', but it actually wasn't until April I ended up at Frenchay, and my mum says (cos I can't really remember it to be honest) the minute that I actually took like my shirt off and stuff like that and they saw what was underneath and they tried to get blood from me and they realised they just couldn't, they realised how bad it was.

The Monday after that Friday I had got a call from CAHMS saying 'Come'. At the first appointment with CAHMS, I went with my mum and we met our first family therapist - we had two in the end. He first of all did my weight and recorded everything and I think for the first time my mum realised how terrible it was, I mean he made it seem real. It was very very scary. We very much took the family based therapy approach, I had two family therapists and at most of my appointments, certainly the early ones, they were both there. Originally it was weekly, umm I'd go there, get weighed, have a sort of two hour appointment with them, discuss things, feelings, and then as my weight began to approach what was considered at least slightly normal, we started to make it monthly, but we'd discuss maybe what was the cause of it, and feelings behind it, rather than are you eating, are you scared, how are you feeling.

One thing I can remember (and it just shows how fuzzy it was), I actually created a little imaginary friend. She'd just scream at me every time I tried to eat, it had really really pickled my brain to be honest.

I'd say that whilst my two therapists were absolutely fantastic, the real healing came from my family. They said to them, pretty bluntly, 'If you don't make her eat, she will die', so, it sort of made me give in a bit, like, my parents would ask me very nicely and say like you've gotta go and have this like big milkshake. Previously it would have been, no matter how nicely they asked it was no, whereas I did eventually give in to it, when, after I'd been admitted to CAHMS. What CAHMS and my parents have managed to do is they've learnt to understand my personality and my ways enough to get me to a well stage through ways that I was, not comfortable with, but less uncomfortable with.

I think that it will always be my little thing that if I do get stressed and it is a weak point for me, I could relapse, but in the past sort of two years I've grown up a bit, I've done my exams for the first time, I've had relationships for the first time and I think that it really helps you out cos as you get older you do grow a certain level of resistance to stuff like that. I'm significantly happier now than I was when I was 15, even before I got the eating disorder, and I think all I would say to anyone who gets an eating disorder is just hang in there because you've only got things that are good to come, your life will get better.

For the family you've gotta have a strong relationship with CAHMS because you have to really work with them, you have to take on everything they say because all they want to do is help you. I just remember the day I got discharged; my mum actually umm hugged the therapist, cried. I think she was so happy it was over, but also she was so grateful to them because they saved her kids life...