

Dear Parent,

Did you know that most long-term mental health problems begin in adolescence? Around 75% of mental illnesses start before a person's 18th birthday.

I'm writing to you as a fellow parent to share my experience of supporting my daughter through a difficult transition in her life. These challenges caught us off guard and in facing them head on, we have become more confident to talk to our daughter and help her protect her mental health.

I was particularly interested to hear about the Bloom Resource Library, and the role it will play in supporting parents and carers to have conversations with young people about mental health.

This is my story which demonstrates how powerful these conversations can be.

When my daughter started college, we believed she was taking her first step into a more independent life.

In her final year she seemed a little stressed around her exams, but my partner and I weren't too worried. She was a sociable person and her friends visited our house.

Within the first few months of college she was working part-time at a restaurant and was out of the house a lot more. We started to see her less and when we tried to probe about what was going on she told us that she had everything under control.

When exam time arrived, she started to look unwell and we weren't sure if she was eating properly. We were becoming really worried. When we tried to talk to her she just said that she wasn't sleeping because she felt a bit worried about exams. She just had to 'get through the next few weeks'.

My partner and I agreed one evening that we needed to find out how she was. I felt uncomfortable about how to approach this.

After seeing a film together (one of her favourite activities), she seemed a little bit more relaxed. I

mentioned that I had noticed she seemed unhappy and that we were worried about her. She began to open up and explained that she was struggling to make new friends at college, wasn't sleeping and was terrified of her exam results.

College had promised to be an exciting time and she was actually finding it really difficult. She didn't want to message her friends because on social media everything seemed to be going well for them. She felt upset and ashamed that things weren't going the same way for her.

As her parent I wanted to tell her to quit her job, and to focus just on college, and to see her friends more often, but instead I listened and discussed lots of different options with her.

We revisited these conversations many times. Sometimes they went really well and other times it felt like there were steps backwards, but the commitment to support her through this transition was solid.

Once we'd gained our daughter's trust, we experimented with a few different tools to help build her confidence and skills around prioritisation, social pressures and how to protect her mental health. We found ways to remind her to do things she enjoys even when she is really busy. She has reconnected with friends from schools and is cautiously trying out friendships at college. Every now and then things still get on top of her, but she seems much better now at speaking up if she needs help. She is also happier for me to ask about how she's doing.

Looking back at this time, if we'd had the resources from the Bloom Resource Library to help us, myself and my daughter would have been in a much better place much more quickly. I urge you to take this opportunity to really make the most of them to help your young people thrive.

Yours,

A fellow parent.

