

It's Always Good to Talk

The faded poster, tacked to the community noticeboard by the park gates, usually went unnoticed by Elara. She'd walk past it every morning, her gaze fixed on the cracked pavement, her shoulders hunched against a weight no one else could see. Today, though, something snagged her attention. Perhaps it was the way the morning sun caught the bold, simple font, or perhaps it was just the sheer exhaustion that finally made her slow down.

She read:

Mental Health Notice Be courageous and talk.

Elara felt a bitter laugh catch in her throat. Courage? She felt anything but. For months, the world had been muted, a dull ache behind her eyes. Anxiety gnawed at her, a relentless current beneath the surface, while a heavy low mood pressed down, crushing her spirit. Even getting out of bed felt like an act of defiance against an invisible force.

The poster continued:

Many in our community silently suffer with anxiety, low mood, and depression.

Yes, she thought, *like me*. It was a quiet, suffocating truth. Her friends, her family – they saw her, yes, but they didn't see her. Not fully. How could they, when she'd become so adept at the performance? The forced smiles, the quick "I'm fine" that was a lie whispered a thousand times a day.

We have been conditioned to recognise and show empathy to people who display a physical injury or disability.

She remembered a few weeks ago, tripping on a loose paving stone and spraining her ankle. Immediately, a neighbour had rushed to her side, offering help, concern etched on their face. People sent cards, brought meals. But when her mind felt like a tangled knot of wires sparking erratically, when the simple act of breathing felt like a monumental effort, there was no cast, no crutches, no visible sign for anyone to rally around.

In the past we were led to believe that poor mental health or anxiety was a sign of weakness however the opposite is in reality true.

This line hit her hard. Weakness. That was it. That was the core of her shame. She had always been strong, capable. This persistent internal battle felt like a failing, a personal flaw she had to hide, lest it expose her as less than.

While experiencing a period of poor mental health or anxiety we feel low and weak, but our strength comes from reaching out.

Strength from reaching out? The idea felt outlandish. Reaching out meant admitting the struggle, pulling back the curtain on the carefully constructed facade. It meant vulnerability, and vulnerability felt like the antithesis of strength. Yet, the words held a strange, undeniable truth. The effort it took just to exist right now, to feign normality, was immense. Perhaps the real strength lay in dropping the act.

We need to speak; we need to let others know that it is the first step to recovery.

First step. The mountain before her seemed insurmountable, the path to recovery shrouded in fog. But a first step... that felt less daunting.

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With support and friends on the journey with us we can, and we will beat both the stigma of mental health and empower those who feel isolated and alone to begin to live their lives again.

Friends. The thought brought a prickle of tears to her eyes. She'd pushed them away, convinced they wouldn't understand, that she'd be a burden. The isolation, self-imposed as it was, had become another layer of the suffocating weight.

When in a bad place it can seem, the road is too long but with the support of friends that road will be easier to walk.

Elara stared at the last lines, her heart aching with a fragile hope.

Often it can be easier to speak to someone you do not know initially, and that is where, groups like The Samaritans, Aware and Pieta House come in. They are a friendly voice on the other end of the phone to listen and help you to find the confidence to take the next step to recovery.

A friendly voice. Someone who wouldn't judge, wouldn't know the "old Elara" she felt she'd lost. The idea of a stranger felt less terrifying than the thought of confiding in someone close.

Morning always comes after the night, and light and joy will come back into your life.

A tiny flicker ignited within her, no bigger than a match flame in a vast, dark cave. She thought of mornings past, filled with the simple joy of birdsong, the warmth of coffee. She remembered laughter, genuine, unrestrained laughter. Could that really come back?

Elara pulled out her phone, her fingers trembling slightly. She didn't call Samaritans immediately. First, she opened her messages. She stared at her best friend Liam's name. A thousand words formed and dissolved in her mind. Then, she remembered the poster's first command: *Be courageous and talk.*

She typed, slowly at first, then with a surge of desperate honesty: "Liam, are you free for a call later? I... I haven't been doing so well. I need to talk."

Her thumb hovered over 'Send'. This was it. The first step. The vulnerability. The courage. She took a deep breath, the deepest she'd taken in months, and pressed send.

A moment later, her phone buzzed. Liam's reply: "Of course, Elara. Any time. Call me now if you want."

The simple message was a lifeline. A tiny crack appeared in the wall she'd built around herself, letting in the smallest sliver of light. The road ahead still seemed long, but it no longer felt utterly impassable. Maybe, just maybe, it wouldn't be so lonely after all.

She put her phone back in her pocket, the poster's final words echoing in her mind.

IT'S ALWAYS GOOD TO TALK.



Are you feeling Anxious, Lonely, Depressed ?

SAMARITANS
OPEN 24 HOURS
116 123

PIETA HOUSE
OPEN 24 HOURS
1800 247 247
or text HELP to 51444

HELPLINES

AWARE
OPEN 10am-10pm Mon-Sun
1800 80 48 48

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PARISH OF
SS. PETER & PAUL
Athlone, Drum & Clonown