

ENCOURAGING CHURCH FRIENDS TO SUPPORT US

In the work I do, I've received a lot of emails from people who have found it hard to stay in the church, especially when they are honest about their mental health issues. There is a lot of misunderstanding and the fall-out can be hurtful and devastating. Yet as Christians we need spiritual support. We need our friends to encourage us as we go through our ups and downs. How can we help them help us? How can we help to create a church where you could – as the Bible says – *"...live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble."* (1 Peter 3:8)

- Have you had the courage to be honest about your mental health problems in church? Tell us about it.
- Describe the kind of support you receive from your church friends.

Too often, though, we are presented with the question Eugene Peterson asks in his introduction to the book of Job in *The Message*:

"What do we do about the nice people in church who tell us everything is going to be just all right if we simply think such-and-such and do such-and-such?"

- Have you had that experience? How did it make you feel?
- How should we approach the subject with our church friends?

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There are no hard and fast rules for talking about your own mental health. You should never feel under pressure to tell people that you have a mental health problem if you don't want to. But sometimes having the courage to speak out can help you feel better in yourself, and more accepted by others.

You may sometimes meet with a negative reaction from people. But sometimes being honest about your mental health can make you feel better, despite people's reactions - because it means you don't have to keep things hidden any more.

If you feel ready to talk about your mental health problem, here are a few points to help you out...

I think I have a mental health problem: tips on talking

- **Be prepared:** Think about the different reactions, positive and negative, that the person might have so you're prepared. The person will be thinking about their perception of mental illness, you as a person and how the two fit together.
- **Choose a good time:** Choose a time and place when you feel comfortable and ready to talk.
- **Be ready for lots of questions...or none:** The person you are talking to might have lots of questions or need further formation to help them understand. Or they might feel uncomfortable and try to move the conversation on – if this happens it's still helpful that the first step has been taken.
- **An initial reaction might not last:** The person might initially react in a way that's not helpful – maybe changing the subject, using clichés rather than listening. But give them time.
- **Have some information ready:** Sometimes people find it easier to find out more in their own time – why not have one of our [leaflets](#) to hand?
- **Keep it light:** We know that sometimes people are afraid to talk about mental health because they feel they don't know what to say or how to help. So keeping the conversation light will help make you both feel relaxed.
- **Take up opportunities to talk:** If someone asks you about your mental health, don't shy away, be yourself and answer honestly.
- **Courage is contagious:** Often once mental health is out in the open people want to talk. Don't be surprised if your honesty encourages other people to talk about their own experiences.

Be encouraged by what Jesus taught: Jesus taught us about love and forgiveness. He taught us not to judge others. Jesus taught us to be genuine and not hypocritical, to pray and to have faith. Finally, Jesus taught us to follow Him and to place our faith and trust in Him.

Please pray that our churches will follow Christ's teachings. Be encouraged to know that's what God's will is for the church. Can we work with God and help make that happen?