

Many do not realise that what people with mental illness need is more love, support and professional help, not guilt and criticism.

Matt's story

MY name is Matt*. I have been ill for 20 years. The doctor diagnosed me with schizophrenia. My concentration in my studies and work is affected. I also have difficulty in keeping friends because they couldn't understand me, and what is happening to me. Initially, I didn't understand myself either. I felt confused all the time because I didn't have insight into what was happening to me. I also felt isolated. At first I thought something physical was wrong with me instead of mentally. I was hospitalised for a physical examination. The doctors found nothing wrong with me physically so they referred me to a psychiatrist. Because I had difficulty concentrating, I discontinued my studies and worked with my mum. Even though I was taking medicine, it was still difficult to focus on my work. I worked with my mum for seven years. My mum and her staff were very supportive of me, but my condition got worse, so my doctor referred me to the day care at the hospital. I attended the day care centre for one and a half years. Activities there included group therapy, art therapy, relaxation exercises, and craftwork sessions. There, I got better, so the doctor-in-charge referred me to another day care centre to do craftwork. I attended that centre for three and a half years. Other activities there included baking cookies, line dancing, singing, group sessions, library etc. When I was there, I found I could concentrate easier. It was because I could do quite a lot of the craftwork there that my confidence grown. Subsequently, the centre referred me to a job working in an exercise centre for slimming and health. It feels good to be able to work outside again. Overall, I feel better compared to the past.

Cassy's story

I am Cassy* and I am now 36. At age 34, I was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Two years ago, I gradually retreated from my family members and friends. I stayed in a rented house and locked myself in that house. I did not talk to anybody, not even the neighbours. I would only come out of the house when I needed to do my grocery shopping. I retreated myself completely from society and spent my time doing my own activities, such as house chores and reading. In the beginning, there was a noticeable deterioration in the quality of my personal relationships with people, and that gradually affected my work. I experienced perceptual distortions and irrational thoughts. I believed that my uncle controlled everyone around me. I thought that nobody cared about me and that they were always gossiping about me behind my back. I was suspicious of relatives and friends and was convinced that I was being watched all the time. Therefore, I retreated into myself and lived in my own world. My family members wanted me to see a psychiatrist but I refused. Having no choice, they consulted specialists and healers and brought them to the house. Unfortunately, none of them could help me get out of my isolation. Soon I was hospitalised against my will. During the second hospitalisation period, and after mixing and talking to patients with all kinds of mental disorders, I told myself that I would not want to be admitted again for the third time. I took my medication regularly and gradually started to communicate with my mother, family members and friends. After a few months, I started working again. As a result, I

Living with mental illness

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regained my self-confidence and began to resume my normal life. ♦ </p><p

can be controlled with proper and regular medications</p>source : The Star7 October 2007<p>

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