

SATURDAY 18TH AUGUST 2023

With Lavinia Donling

HALF TERM SEASON

For some young people, like in Leicestershire, it was half term last week, yet for others it is half-term this week. Young people need a break from education, and 8 weeks is definitely time for that to happen. However, some families have experienced 8 weeks of increasing anxiety, distress and trauma. Whilst the expectation is that young people will adapt to the new academic year, invariably from a new Teacher or Teachers, with new learning, there is the expectation to "grit your teeth", 'grin and bear it' or "get used to it". Personally and professionally, I would seriously challenge this. I spend hours in therapy with young people and their parents unpicking the damage that has been saddled on to the young person. The first half term in a new academic year is more than sufficient to review how school is impacting on your child's mental health. Many parents in a quandary about this will know how many times they have ,

raised concerns, or asked for strategies to be implemented, or are being called by school voicing their concerns. These are your markers that things are not right and need an urgent review with changes made to support your child. For one of my clients, no longer under my care, the parents spent 4yrs raising concerns about their child's deteriorating mental health. Only when I stepped in, complaining to the school and the Board of Governors, did school finally begin to consider changing their expectations to support the young person.

One of my teenage clients very kindly put it into words how they described their feelings around school, and their reflections around therapy from TMW.





“ I still worry that I’ll find things too repetitive or boring or too stressful to be worth it. That is sort of what happened with school. I was forced to go in every Friday for 2 periods but I just about managed to do it, although eventually I completely lost any enjoyment or relief after leaving because I realised I would just have to do the same again and again.

I have bad memories of school and the bad feelings and thoughts i felt, although I have bad thoughts and feelings nowadays, at least I don’t actually have something bad physically to deal with (like school). I still can’t understand how I used to go into school every day, and I can’t understand how people still do, even if you aren’t struggling that much it still seems so tiring. I think the most demotiva-

ting thing is when you just manage to get through a tough thing and then realise you need to do it again soon. It’s tough to continue to go through tough things while you are attempting to recover, since you don’t get much motivation when you aren’t able to enjoy certain things (even if you managed to get through them). I was slowly going back into school, at first I felt rewarded once it was over and I got to rest. But eventually I started to realise after every-time I got through it, I would just have to go and do it again the next week for a long while. That completely put me off school more than I was already off it.

Before Lavinia, I was struggling more than I ever had. It was all made worse by my previous attempts at therapy by the likes of CAMHS and referrals from doctors. When you would have therapy sessions it felt like you should’ve been getting better, but you weren’t, and that made me feel even worse. I felt misunderstood and that others couldn’t understand how I really felt. With Lavinia I felt like she actually cared and knew how I felt. I always struggled with understanding why or how I felt the way I did, but Lavinia knew and could teach it in an easily understandable way.

Unlike before, I could tell that it was helping, and everything she taught me helped both comfort me and help me deal with my problems better. My only regret was not having therapy with her earlier.”

Our children are the most precious beings. They build our future for their children. Our mental health is pivotal in it being a success story rather than them being a drain on society. Children, generally, do not get a choice in where they attend school, and, for some, can be a place of distress, torture, and trauma. It is imperative we do not prolong their suffering and review as swiftly as possible and take action. This half term is a chance for parents to take stock, discuss with their children their difficulties, and take action. I know that many parents are not listened to, dismissed for their concerns, and made to feel it is down to their poor parenting. Regardless, outside of the blame culture that is often foisted on us all, we need to see the bigger picture like our young person has conveyed. Young people do not sign up for a lifetime of poor mental health - adults inflict that - so parents who have concerns, find the right advocate to support and challenge in a way that education will listen and cannot ignore, like our family, 2 years ago, when I made a formal complaint to the Governors. Change is necessary to improve our young people's mental health for better outcomes for their adult life and future children.

Today, I am off to Leicester to do some networking with local radio stations to see how many of them promote positive mental health and wellbeing.

Have a great weekend everyone!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lavinia". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'L'.