

Podcast S2 EP9 – Stigma around taking medication for your mental health

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<v GINYA> Hi, and welcome back to Stigma to Strength.

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<v GINYA> I'm Ginya, a Charlie Waller Youth Ambassador, and the host of the second season of the podcast.

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<v GINYA> We're so happy you're here.

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<v GINYA> This season, we'll be covering a range of topics chosen for and by the Youth Ambassadors who are part of our team.

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<v GINYA> Stigma to Strength is a podcast that opens dialogue on mental health and the highs and lows of adolescents.

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<v GINYA> All perspectives expressed here are personal and do not constitute formal medical or psychological advice.

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<v GINYA> If you need help, please seek informed, personalized support from trained professionals.

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<v GINYA> Resources for beginning this process can be found in the show notes.

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<v GINYA> You deserve support, and no matter how it feels right now, you are not alone.

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<v GINYA> Seeking help reflects strength, and we're happier with us, whether you're a young person, a parent or a teacher.

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<v GINYA> To kick off season two, today we'll be discussing Stigma and Medication.

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<v GINYA> Two of my fellow youth ambassadors, Amy and Sophie, have graciously joined the dialogue.

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<v GINYA> Before we say hi to them, let me tell you a little bit about who they are.

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<v GINYA>Sophie is in her last year of university and hopes to have a career in psychology.

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<v GINYA>She has worked with children and has a keen interest in neurodiversity and mental health.

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<v GINYA>She loves to travel and keep fit.

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<v GINYA>Her favourite place she's been to is Norway, but she's hoping to visit Japan this summer.

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<v GINYA>Amy is a PhD student and hopes to have a career in research.

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<v GINYA>She used to be a teacher and has a keen interest in supporting children's and young people's mental health.

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<v GINYA>She loves dogs and being outdoors.

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<v GINYA>Welcome to Stigma to Strength, Sophie and Amy.

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<v GINYA>Thanks so much for taking the time to be here today.

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<v GINYA>Good to see you both.

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<v AMY>Thank you.

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<v GINYA>Before we hop in, I was wondering if you could both tell me one small thing that made you smile this week.

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<v SOPHIE>I think for me, one thing that made me smile was almost finishing my undergraduate degree.

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<v SOPHIE>And I'd also say seeing the sun come out because I'm excited for summer as well.

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<v GINYA>A classic in the UK.

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<v GINYA>Yeah, for sure.

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<v GINYA>The sun has been good.

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<v GINYA>What about you, Amy?

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<v AMY>I visited a school last week and they had pet chickens, which was really cool and really unusual.

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<v AMY>But I just, yeah, it brought a really nice vibe, I think, to the day.

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<v GINYA>I think mine would be, I was in kind of a bad mood yesterday and I got on the tube and I usually draw on the tube a lot.

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<v GINYA>And there was this little girl who sat next to me who was also drawing and it became this little spectacle for our little car because everyone was watching the two of us and she was looking at what I was doing.

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<v GINYA>And it was just a very beautiful little public moment of solidarity and creativity.

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<v GINYA>So I loved that.

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<v GINYA>Cool.

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<v GINYA>And how are you both feeling today?

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<v AMY>Yeah, good, excited to get stuck in, yeah.

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<v GINYA>Glad to hear it.

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<v GINYA>And I am so glad you both are here and happy to talk about today's topic, which is stigma and medication, which we're gonna try to talk about from a more social and personal lens rather than a medical or overarching lens, because this is about our personal experiences.

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<v GINYA>So I wanted to first just start by asking you why this topic matters to you or why both of you are interested in coming to speak on this particular theme.

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<v AMY>Yeah, so I've been taking medication for my mental health on and off for about 10 years now.

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<v AMY>And when I first started out, there was a lot of misconceptions that I had about it.

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<v AMY>And a lot of questions that I think would have been really helpful to know.

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<v AMY>I'd really like to help create something that I wish I would have known when I was a teenager kind of thing.

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<v GINYA>That makes a lot of sense.

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<v GINYA>I feel like often when we're involved in mental health things, it's just trying to better what we went through.

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<v GINYA>So I like that motivation.

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<v GINYA>What about you, Sophie?

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<v SOPHIE>Yeah, so I've been taking medication since I was about 15.

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<v SOPHIE>And I'm just really passionate about trying to stop the judgment and misconceptions about taking medication.

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<v GINYA>Yeah, I think that is a huge part of all of it.

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<v GINYA>That's kind of why we're combining medication with the idea of stigma.

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<v GINYA>I think I at least personally, I don't know if I grew up with a lot of narratives about medication specifically, but I knew that I grew up with a lot of narratives surrounding mental health.

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<v GINYA>But I was wondering if you guys can recall kind of what narratives you had about medication before it was introduced to something that was personal to you, or things that you encountered when you were younger.

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<v SOPHIE>I think for me, medication was kind of seen as a sign of weakness and that there's something wrong with you and that you need to be fixed.

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<v SOPHIE>And I think over the past few years, that's kind of got better and better and there's been more understanding about it.

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<v SOPHIE>But definitely when I was growing up, there was misconceptions.

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<v SOPHIE>You know, you're gonna become dependent on medication.

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<v SOPHIE>You know, there's something wrong with you, you need fixing.

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<v SOPHIE>And I just kind of grew up and that since I've got older and older on medication, I think it's got a lot better kind of the narratives around discussing medication.

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<v AMY>Yeah, I think like Sophie, it felt quite twofold when I started taking medication because part of me felt this kind of like intense relief that it wasn't just all in my head.

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<v AMY>And there is actually something that somebody else recognizes is, I don't want to use the word wrong, but something that I was struggling with, like was a genuine condition and something that I was worthy of support for.

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<v AMY>But at the same time, I didn't want taking meds to become my sort of like self image and that I found it really difficult to, even now, like the distinction between do I not like doing this thing because I have an anxiety disorder or is it just not my personality to like doing this thing?

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<v AMY>And I was worried that meds might kind of alter that bit.

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<v GINYA>Yeah, that also makes a lot of sense.

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<v GINYA>I feel like it's difficult when you're in our age group because we're still trying to figure out what our default like quote unquote is as a person.

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<v GINYA>And obviously like mental health is a part of that.

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<v GINYA>And to yet kind of try and separate out the things that are normal human experiences because a lot of things are changing and it's difficult to not know what's going on with your life or what job you're gonna have or who you're dating or whatnot, just very like in your early 20s things.

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<v GINYA>And then things that are like kind of something that deserves more support and medication from a professional standpoint.

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<v GINYA>So that makes, yeah, that's what I think an important point.

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<v GINYA>I guess, do you remember when you first started taking medication kind of how that idea was presented to you by your doctor or by a professional and kind of how you felt about that experience?

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<v SOPHIE>Yeah, so I struggled with anxiety and depression around the age of 15.

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<v SOPHIE>And I remember really clearly the conversation I had with my doctor.

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<v SOPHIE>And yeah, it felt like it was quite a big deal at the like in the moment.

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<v SOPHIE>And then obviously I pitched a prescription, started medication.

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<v SOPHIE>Yeah, I just remember it really clearly.

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<v SOPHIE>And then I remember like being at school and having to tell the teacher because they had to give me my medication every morning.

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<v SOPHIE>And yeah, it was, in a way, it was relief for me as well because I needed something to help me cope with how low I felt and my anxiety.

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<v SOPHIE>So it was kind of mixed feelings about how I felt being on them.

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<v SOPHIE>But when I look back, I am glad I started on medication because it's really helped me in the long run.

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<v GINYA>And do you remember like what the first like couple months of being on medication was like?

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<v GINYA>Because I know sometimes like it can take a while for like something to actually like affect you or you feel a change.

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<v SOPHIE>I think the thing that I found really hard was getting into a routine of taking them.

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<v SOPHIE>So I had to take them in the morning and at tea time.

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<v SOPHIE>And at the start, I had, you know, I set an alarm on my phone.

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<v SOPHIE>I was forgetting.

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<v SOPHIE>But now, because I've been on meds, you know, most of my adult life, it's kind of just become part of my self-care routine now, part of my routine.

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<v SOPHIE>I get up, take my medication.

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<v SOPHIE>And then before bed or dinner, I'll take them again.

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<v SOPHIE>And I think the longer you take them, the more kind of routine it comes as.

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<v SOPHIE>But yeah, definitely at the start, when I started taking them, obviously I was a teenager, so I was out and about trying to like do different things.

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<v SOPHIE>And it did feel a bit as if, oh, you know, I've got to take my meds now.

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<v SOPHIE>But yeah, looking back, it's been beneficial to have started them.

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<v GINYA>Yeah, that's like an interesting point that I haven't thought about, of kind of like the responsibility angle of it.

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<v GINYA>Because if you start taking medication when you're quite young, you haven't like had that many things that were something that you're supposed to do for yourself and kind of a regular.

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<v SOPHIE>I was 15 and it was kind of like, well, do I take charge of my medication or does my mom?

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<v SOPHIE>Obviously, I'm at the age where I'm trying to be more independent, do more things for myself.

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<v SOPHIE>And we kind of had a bit of a chat, well, who's going to take responsibility for taking them?

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<v SOPHIE>And because I wanted to be independent, I kind of led the way and was like, yeah, I'll manage them, I'll take them.

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<v SOPHIE>But then my mom would be there just to kind of check on me that I was taking them and I wasn't not taking them.

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<v GINYA>Yeah, I think that's what's so interesting about adolescence.

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<v GINYA>And I studied abroad when I was 15 and I ended up doing my graduate research about kind of that age of your life.

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<v GINYA>And I think this tension between the independence that you feel and the dependency that you have by still being someone who lives with your family.

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<v GINYA>And I think that intersects in a really interesting way when it comes to something like medication, especially because it's so informed, I guess, by the narratives your family or community would have about medication.

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<v GINYA>Amy, do you have anything to add to that kind of idea?

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<v AMY>Yeah, I mean, I find it really hard to remember how I felt when I started taking medication, I think, because I was in a really bad place.

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<v AMY>It was kind of like a last resort that I would hopefully feel better.

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<v AMY>And I think I'd been to the doctors a couple of times as a teenager about my anxiety and it was kind of brushed off as like hormones that will settle out or, you know, just a normal part of growing up, which it can be.

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<v AMY>But I think because it was more pervasive than that, you know, I kept going back and then I got given a link to this kind of like online therapy sort of platform, which wasn't particularly helpful.

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<v AMY>You know, it was very like vague and generalised.

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<v AMY>But I think the kind of narrative from the doctor, which is kind of, well, you're not really ill enough to like refer you to any like external services kind of thing, and also they're incredibly under resourced.

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<v AMY>So this could kind of be like a stopgap.

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<v AMY>And I remember them really like hammering the point that the first kind of four to six weeks might make you feel worse before you feel better.

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<v AMY>And I just really held on to that for those four weeks because I did have really bad side effects at first.

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<v AMY>And I think it just took a lot for my body to like adjust to what I was taking.

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<v AMY>But I just stuck with it because I knew that hopefully there would be an end to that and there was, and I felt a lot more normal taking them.

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<v GINYA>Yeah, I think that sometimes when you can have a preface like that, it's really helpful because then you can wrap your head around it.

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<v GINYA>I guess similar to that, is there anything else that either you were told or you wish you had been told before you started taking medication that would have made the process of transitioning on to that easier or just would have changed the way that you could think about the role that medication played in your life?

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<v SOPHIE>I think they should have kind of drilled home having a combination of things, not just rely on medication, but like Amy said, get a referral to mental health services, seeing a therapist or a counsellor.

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<v SOPHIE>I know there's been a lot of research going into how there's a combination of both and how by having treatment and medication at the same time can actually better your outcomes.

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<v SOPHIE>And I also think the side effects are a really important thing to talk about.

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<v SOPHIE>And I wish that I had been told about that more, especially when I started taking antidepressant, like Amy said, the first few weeks.

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<v SOPHIE>I actually felt my mood get worse and I actually nearly said to them, they're not working.

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<v SOPHIE>And they said, hold on, you know, have a few more weeks and see how you feel.

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<v SOPHIE>And eventually it got better and it actually started helping.

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<v SOPHIE>But in terms of the side effects, I wish I'd knew that before.

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<v SOPHIE>And I could have kind of weighed up the cost of benefits a bit more.

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<v SOPHIE>But then when I did kind of see it, the benefits kind of weighed up more than the costs.

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<v AMY>Yeah, I think similarly to Sophie, I remember my GP kind of went through the general side effects that you'd got with any kind of medication, but didn't mention the specifics.

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<v GINYA>I also think the point on weighing up the impact of some, I mean, I think that's just true with any decision you make, of trying to be really, I guess, very intentional about tracking how something is changing the way that you feel and the impact that it's having on your life.

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<v GINYA>Because I feel like sometimes the issue is just that you can get caught up in these external narratives rather than in your own personal experience of what is or isn't helping you feel better on the day to day.

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<v GINYA>What are other things that have helped you in addition to medication in kind of managing your mental health or challenges that you've had?

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<v SOPHIE>So I've been lucky to have some sort of therapy.

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<v SOPHIE>I've been through DBT, which is Dialectical Behavioural Therapy.

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<v SOPHIE>And it's basically learning skills to help with your emotions and regulate your emotions.

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<v SOPHIE>As a child and a teen, I struggled really badly with regulating my emotions and going from really low to really high.

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<v SOPHIE>And I started this therapy and it was really beneficial.

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<v SOPHIE>But I do think that the medication alongside that really helped as well.

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<v SOPHIE>And then it comes back to the idea of having both inputs from both.

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<v SOPHIE>I even just like talking to a counsellor at school, you know, going to a GP, asking for support.

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<v SOPHIE>I know resources are quite limited, but I really, my mental health improved a lot, like having even just someone to talk to, even if it's your GP or, you know, a counsellor, or even just talking to a friend or family, just open up and get that kind of weight off your shoulders.

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<v SOPHIE>I think it's really beneficial.

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<v AMY>Yeah, like Sophie, I've had cognitive behavioural therapy or CBT, which has been really helpful, because sometimes I think the negative thinking patterns that I get in become so habitual that I don't realise I'm doing it.

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<v AMY>And actually like breaking down how you think and how you can challenge some of those anxious thoughts is really important.

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<v AMY>But also, like you said, I did find it really difficult to access that at first.

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<v AMY>And it wasn't really till I was at uni and I managed to get counselling through uni, which is why I'm glad, especially having been a teacher, that there's such a focus on wellbeing now in schools and it's now on the curriculum.

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<v AMY>And there's so much more dialogue.

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<v SOPHIE>Yeah, there's a lot more out there about self-care, self-soothe, look after yourself, make a self-soothe box.

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<v SOPHIE>And that really did help me with my therapist.

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<v SOPHIE>I made my own box, like fiddle toys, something with the five senses.

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<v SOPHIE>So even if you can't access that support, you can help yourself and learn skills to soothe yourself and give yourself self-care.

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<v SOPHIE>And I guess that kind of comes back to taking medication.

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<v SOPHIE>That's part of your self-care routine.

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<v SOPHIE>It's part of you, it's part of your routine.

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<v GINYA>Yeah, I really like that angle.

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<v GINYA>And I kind of think about it as like, we have this toolbox of different things that help us feel able to live as best we can.

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<v GINYA>And that medication would be one of the, like the hammer in the box or whatever.

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<v GINYA>And then you also have the screwdriver or whatnot.

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<v GINYA>At this point, let's take a break.

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<v GINYA>Check in on how you're feeling and do what you gotta do.

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<v GINYA>Stretch, run to the bathroom, eat a snack, do jazz hands, whatever suits you.

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<v GINYA>We'll be back shortly.

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<v GINYA>Another thing that I think would be really interesting to talk about is how medication use changes over time, or if there's any changes that happen when you switch your dosage or come off of medication.

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<v GINYA>And I was wondering if either of you have experience with that and what those transitions were like for you.

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<v SOPHIE>Yeah, so I've been, I've trialed several antidepressants and particular floxetine.

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<v SOPHIE>And when I went on it, I was already having suicidal thoughts, ideation, but I felt that after a couple of weeks being on it, it actually made those thoughts and feelings worse.

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<v SOPHIE>So I think it's just the importance of talking to your clinician and making sure that they're monitoring how you are.

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<v SOPHIE>And I guess the kind of the whole topic about prescribing young people, children, medication, is quite a controversial subject.

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<v AMY>But I think it's really important that we're having these conversations because children, young people do take medication for their mental health.

00:15:59.987 --> 00:16:05.127
<v AMY>I mean, we have, and that was a study by the National Institute for Health Research in 2020.

00:16:05.447 --> 00:16:11.667
<v AMY>And they found that antidepressant use in children aged 12 to 17 has more than doubled over the last few years.

00:16:12.047 --> 00:16:18.347
<v AMY>So, and SSRIs, which are what you've just spoken about were the most common, though it's, yeah, it's important that we have these conversations.

00:16:18.827 --> 00:16:28.807

<v GINYA>Right, I think like there's this like tension between obviously wanting to be careful when you are adding something to someone's like bodily system, because there's a lot of different changes that are happening as you're growing up anyway.

00:16:29.167 --> 00:16:32.687

<v GINYA>But also like a recognition that like, this is real and people need help.

00:16:32.727 --> 00:16:43.807

<v GINYA>And like to not take either end of that spectrum like too intensely, but really kind of try to view things holistically and what works for each individual person, which I think also relates to what you were saying.

00:16:43.867 --> 00:16:49.627

<v SOPHIE>And I guess like for things like personality disorders, it's emerging when you're a teenager.

00:16:49.647 --> 00:16:55.907

<v SOPHIE>It's just, it's, they don't necessarily diagnose people under the age of 18, because it's still merging and you're growing.

00:16:56.027 --> 00:17:02.447

<v SOPHIE>And I've seen kind of sometimes people being given like antipsychotics, antidepressants, but when they've reached the age of 18.

00:17:02.527 --> 00:17:08.067

<v SOPHIE>But then I kind of disagree, like if you're, you know, you need support and you're younger, then it should be kind of given to you.

00:17:08.087 --> 00:17:11.487

<v SOPHIE>But I guess it's that kind of way up of, is it helpful?

00:17:11.887 --> 00:17:17.047

<v SOPHIE>You know, should we treat it at this stage or wait till it's like properly diagnosed?

00:17:18.167 --> 00:17:26.747

<v GINYA>And then that's also just about like how informed to the practitioners that you work with are about how things present specifically in like the era of growing up.

00:17:27.007 --> 00:17:27.407

<v SOPHIE>Yeah.

00:17:27.487 --> 00:17:33.707

<v SOPHIE>And that's why it's so important to go to regular checkups, talk to your clinician, tell them what side effects you're having.

00:17:34.107 --> 00:17:35.367

<v SOPHIE>They can adjust the dose.

00:17:35.387 --> 00:17:37.187

<v SOPHIE>They can change the medication.

00:17:37.207 --> 00:17:39.927

<v SOPHIE>I think it's very much trial and error as well.

00:17:40.367 --> 00:17:45.027

<v SOPHIE>So when I was 15, obviously I tried the Fluxotene and then I changed something else.

00:17:45.087 --> 00:17:47.707

<v SOPHIE>And I think it's just about finding that drug that works for you.

00:17:47.727 --> 00:17:57.667

<v GINYA>Another thing that I was wondering about is whether medication like I guess in the way that it was presented to you or the way that you've heard it talked about is seen as something that is like in your life temporarily.

00:17:58.387 --> 00:18:02.307

<v GINYA>Or something that is something that you are going to continue to do for a long term.

00:18:02.327 --> 00:18:04.007

<v GINYA>I was wondering if either of you had thoughts on that?

00:18:04.247 --> 00:18:08.947

<v SOPHIE>Yeah, I was just gonna say, I never thought I'd still be on it, to be honest.

00:18:09.647 --> 00:18:12.847

<v SOPHIE>I did think it was like a temporary thing that I take them and get better.

00:18:13.327 --> 00:18:16.667

<v SOPHIE>And then people were always saying to me, well, you can't just stop cold turkey.

00:18:16.687 --> 00:18:18.047

<v SOPHIE>You have to keep taking them.

00:18:18.067 --> 00:18:20.367

<v SOPHIE>And there was kind of that like dilemma in my mind.

00:18:20.387 --> 00:18:24.207

<v SOPHIE>Well, I don't want to be on them for long, but I need them to keep my mental health better.

00:18:24.587 --> 00:18:27.067

<v SOPHIE>And yeah, like Amy said, she's been on them for 10 years.

00:18:27.827 --> 00:18:28.667

<v SOPHIE>Same for me, really.

00:18:28.687 --> 00:18:31.127

<v SOPHIE>I've been on them, yeah, it'll be 10 years and 25.

00:18:31.167 --> 00:18:35.507

<v SOPHIE>So yeah, I never thought it would be like a long-term thing, but it's kind of turned out that way.

00:18:35.567 --> 00:18:38.727

<v SOPHIE>And I've just kind of accepted that this is what it is.

00:18:38.967 --> 00:18:41.747

<v SOPHIE>And I need to keep taking them to feel better.

00:18:42.047 --> 00:18:43.447

<v SOPHIE>And there shouldn't be shame in that.

00:18:43.687 --> 00:18:46.227

<v GINYA>Yeah, I think that is like an important narrative to put out there.

00:18:46.247 --> 00:18:59.607

<v GINYA>Because I think a lot of times they are presented as kind of this like quick fix for this certain era when really it's something that can be useful in the long term and help people also build other coping mechanisms because they have that stability that's there.

00:18:59.627 --> 00:19:03.287

<v GINYA>Would you guys say that medication is still stigmatized in your communities?

00:19:03.587 --> 00:19:12.487

<v GINYA>Another thing with that, I guess, is if there's any other big myths that surround it that you think it would be good to talk about or at least verbalize your own experiences with.

00:19:12.887 --> 00:19:18.027

<v AMY>Yeah, so I've never really heard the term stigma until it came to be associated with medication.

00:19:18.307 --> 00:19:25.927

<v AMY>And I guess like putting my researchy hat on is something that I've been really interested in, like defining what it actually means to different people as well.

00:19:26.147 --> 00:19:31.407

<v AMY>I don't wanna sound really boring, but I'm gonna talk about this study because I think it's worth mentioning.

00:19:31.447 --> 00:19:36.127

<v AMY>So it was a cross-sectional study by Salaheddin and Mason in 2016.

00:19:36.507 --> 00:19:43.287

<v AMY>And basically what they wanted to do was identify the barriers that prevent young people from seeking support with their mental health.

00:19:44.147 --> 00:19:50.767

<v AMY>And they found that individuals' perceptions of possible stigma was the most common barrier to accessing treatment.

00:19:50.767 --> 00:19:58.347

<v AMY>And the most common within that includes feeling ashamed or embarrassed, concern that seeking help might affect job applications.

00:19:58.367 --> 00:20:03.987

<v AMY>Because like we said, as a teenager, you're thinking about those next steps, you need jobs, whatever it might be.

00:20:04.127 --> 00:20:06.307

<v AMY>Or concern that someone may be seen as weak.

00:20:06.347 --> 00:20:09.107

<v AMY>And those are the top three, which I think is really interesting.

00:20:09.127 --> 00:20:17.467

<v AMY>Because there's stigma in general, I guess, or stigma as a society that we place on people that we see as other or different to ourselves.

00:20:17.487 --> 00:20:26.227

<v AMY>But then there's also that self stigma, which I think is when we kind of internalize those beliefs and adapt our behaviors in response to that.

00:20:26.687 --> 00:20:37.147

<v GINYA>I think that relates a lot to what Sophie was also just saying about like, kind of even in the way that you were saying about how you have just accepted that you will take medication long term and that it's something helpful for you.

00:20:37.407 --> 00:20:44.127

<v GINYA>Like, that is a rewriting of the narrative around it for yourself, like to make it make sense with the experience that you're having.

00:20:45.147 --> 00:20:46.967

<v GINYA>So I think that's a really important point.

00:20:47.067 --> 00:20:57.047

<v GINYA>And it's just also sad, Amy, to think about the research that you're talking about because when it comes down to it, it's like we are holding ourselves back.

00:20:57.107 --> 00:21:06.287

<v GINYA>When the thing is the shame that we place on each other and ourselves, when that's the issue, it's that sad because we have the tools at our dispense, right?

00:21:06.727 --> 00:21:12.767

<v GINYA>Like we've talked about, we are lucky to be growing up in a time now where we're actually exposed to a lot of different things that could help us.

00:21:13.207 --> 00:21:17.827

<v GINYA>And so if we can, like that's a good place to start of breaking things down.

00:21:17.847 --> 00:21:23.707

<v GINYA>If that's the barrier that's keeping us, it's just our stories and our narratives about what's reasonable and what's not reasonable.

00:21:23.887 --> 00:21:34.567

<v SOPHIE>Because I think sometimes people, you know, or you're weak, you're crazy, you're taking meds, but I think it's about turning that narrative around and thinking actually it's a strength that you've asked for help.

00:21:35.027 --> 00:21:36.747

<v SOPHIE>It's a positive that you've asked for help.

00:21:36.867 --> 00:21:38.627

<v AMY>I try and see it as a baseline.

00:21:38.647 --> 00:21:45.827

<v AMY>So like for me, yes, I have been taking medication for pretty much 10 years now in different like dosages.

00:21:45.847 --> 00:21:48.987

<v AMY>I've kind of gone up and down as challenges and things have risen.

00:21:49.507 --> 00:21:53.467

<v AMY>But I think for me, I see it as a baseline that like enables me to be me every day.

00:21:53.487 --> 00:21:59.847

<v AMY>And then it means that I can take advantage of those techniques I've learned during therapy or whatnot.

00:22:00.427 --> 00:22:05.567

<v AMY>I hate the phrase like living your best life because it sounds very cringe, but that's kind of how I try and.

00:22:07.227 --> 00:22:18.487

<v SOPHIE>And I guess there's also a sense of control because by taking the medication you're more in control of your life and you're doing something that would potentially help your mental health and your wellbeing.

00:22:18.487 --> 00:22:30.467

<v SOPHIE>So it kind of gives you that empowerment that you're thinking, right, I'm helping myself, I'm taking these as part of my self care routine and just kind of change the narrative that it's a good thing that you're taking this medication.

00:22:30.847 --> 00:22:37.967

<v GINYA>Right, I think that is an important point too because it's like a lot of times it can feel like our mental health challenges act upon us.

00:22:38.067 --> 00:22:43.467

<v GINYA>So this is like a very tangible way to take control back in a situation where you feel like you haven't had that.

00:22:43.607 --> 00:22:58.787

<v GINYA>And I think that also is like related to just choice, which is like if, for example, you were somebody who started medication when you were young but decided later that that wasn't what was best for you, obviously with the supervision of your mental health provider.

00:22:58.847 --> 00:23:05.667

<v GINYA>That's also important because yeah, it's about feeling empowered that you are approaching what you're dealing with the way that feels good to you.

00:23:05.867 --> 00:23:13.987

<v AMY>I think when you're a young person as well, especially in my teenage years, teenagers are notoriously concerned about their peers' perceptions of them.

00:23:14.007 --> 00:23:18.827

<v AMY>And that's a really heightened period of your life where you wanna fit in and you care what other people think.

00:23:18.907 --> 00:23:20.987

<v AMY>And I remember watching this documentary.

00:23:21.007 --> 00:23:23.307

<v AMY>I can't actually remember what it was.

00:23:23.327 --> 00:23:29.967

<v AMY>I think it must have been a Louis Theroux one where he went to an inpatient provider or something like that.

00:23:30.027 --> 00:23:38.407

<v AMY>And this young woman was talking about her experiences with OCD and she was like, you know, yeah, I do have OCD, but also my favorite color is yellow.

00:23:38.627 --> 00:23:40.667

<v AMY>And I like bananas and other things.

00:23:41.207 --> 00:23:47.407

<v AMY>And that really hammered home to me that actually, yeah, you know, my anxiety is one part of me, but I'm still all these other things.

00:23:47.487 --> 00:23:51.087

<v AMY>And it will always be part of my like makeup, if you will.

00:23:51.487 --> 00:23:53.507

<v AMY>She finished on this quote and I've memorized it.

00:23:53.587 --> 00:23:58.587

<v AMY>I didn't even have to work to memorize it, but she said something like, there's cracks in everything.

00:23:58.987 --> 00:24:02.947

<v AMY>That's how the light gets in and imperfections are where humanity is most visible.

00:24:03.127 --> 00:24:05.247

<v AMY>And I really, really like that and it stuck with me.

00:24:06.127 --> 00:24:07.087

<v GINYA>I love that too.

00:24:07.487 --> 00:24:10.967

<v GINYA>That's really reminding me of this thing my friend once told me.

00:24:11.667 --> 00:24:21.247

<v GINYA>We were talking about anxiety and he was saying that one thing that's really helped him is to understand how his mental health challenges relate to things that he likes about himself.

00:24:21.587 --> 00:24:30.587

<v GINYA>And so we were talking about when you're standing in a circle with other people and somebody comes nearby and they're like, someone would need to move so that person is included in the circle.

00:24:30.807 --> 00:24:37.447

<v GINYA>And he was like, because I have anxiety, I'm aware that if that was me and no one moved for me, I would feel stressed out by that.

00:24:37.687 --> 00:24:41.047

<v GINYA>So I consciously move for that person and like welcome them in.

00:24:41.407 --> 00:24:49.867

<v GINYA>And I feel like, similar to what you were saying, it's like the parts, yeah, the things that are really beautiful about us are all informed, like everything is informed by all of us.

00:24:50.167 --> 00:24:57.927

<v GINYA>And I think that really helps kind of, again, with any narrative of stigma surrounding something, that it's just a little part of us, but also that it's all interconnected.

00:24:58.287 --> 00:25:04.127

<v GINYA>And I don't know, we wouldn't be who we are without the perspectives that were given by all of our experiences.

00:25:05.387 --> 00:25:15.187

<v GINYA>I guess something that might be helpful for some listeners to think about, who maybe are starting their journey of thinking about taking medication, or just what types of tools that they can use in their own life.

00:25:15.207 --> 00:25:18.587

<v GINYA>Do you guys have something that you might wanna say to someone who's in that position?

00:25:18.847 --> 00:25:27.067

<v AMY>Yeah, I think one of the things that my doctor didn't mention to me when I started taking medication, probably because I was like 15 at the time, was sex drive.

00:25:27.427 --> 00:25:31.307

<v AMY>And it's something that I hadn't really heard until I read a BBC article a few weeks ago.

00:25:31.327 --> 00:25:37.007

<v AMY>And it was from a male perspective as well, which I think is incredibly brave to talk about because of stigma.

00:25:37.147 --> 00:25:43.787

<v AMY>And I just don't think that's something that doctors feel comfortable necessarily talking to young people about, especially if they're like parents or whatever in the room with them.

00:25:43.927 --> 00:25:50.947

<v AMY>But I think that is something really important to consider that medication can affect your libido and that's completely normal and okay thing.

00:25:50.987 --> 00:25:55.327

<v AMY>And to seek that support and advice from a reputable source if that applies to you.

00:25:55.987 --> 00:25:57.647

<v GINYA>Yeah, I think that's hugely important.

00:25:57.667 --> 00:25:59.447

<v GINYA>Sophie, do you have anything you want to add?

00:25:59.507 --> 00:26:03.227

<v SOPHIE>I guess it's about letting them know that, you know, like taking medication is valid.

00:26:03.247 --> 00:26:09.227

<v SOPHIE>Just as you would take antibiotics for an infection, you would treat that physical illness, but what about your mental health?

00:26:09.247 --> 00:26:11.747

<v SOPHIE>You need medication to help with that side of things.

00:26:12.187 --> 00:26:18.927

<v SOPHIE>And I just guess it's about, you know, like asking for support, reaching out, also like making sure you're monitoring how you're feeling.

00:26:19.107 --> 00:26:29.707

<v SOPHIE>And yeah, I just think addressing the stigma around medication is just crucial to like promote understanding and empathy where people are struggling can use the support and access effective treatment.

00:26:29.867 --> 00:26:38.847

<v SOPHIE>And just like encouraging open conversations, keep like the dialogue open with, you know, everyone you're talking to and just kind of, if you need the support, just go seek it out.

00:26:38.987 --> 00:26:41.747

<v GINYA>Yeah, I think that that's really key.

00:26:41.887 --> 00:26:48.387

<v GINYA>I think as much as you can inform yourself about all the potential things that happen with any change you make in your life, the better it's gonna be.

00:26:48.827 --> 00:26:51.167

<v GINYA>So I think that is really helpful perspective to add.

00:26:51.427 --> 00:27:08.447

<v GINYA>Also related to what you were saying, Amy, I mean, I'm aware that we all are female identifying people in this conversation, but I did wanna ask you both if you feel in the communities you're a part of, of what you've heard, that there's a difference in perception about men and women taking medication.

00:27:08.887 --> 00:27:19.887

<v AMY>I think the Post Your Pill Movement by Alex George a couple of years ago really opened my eyes to some of the stigma that men face in terms of talking about medication, not necessarily just for mental health, but in general.

00:27:19.947 --> 00:27:29.927

<v AMY>And I think also for both men and women, one of the side effects of SSRIs is that it can interact with alcohol and potentially make you feel worse.

00:27:30.027 --> 00:27:38.927

<v AMY>And like for me personally, I was never really a big drinker anyway, but I found that if I did drink while taking SSRIs, I would feel absolutely horrendous.

00:27:38.967 --> 00:27:40.487

<v AMY>And it just, the two didn't mix.

00:27:40.567 --> 00:27:45.267

<v AMY>Even now, like 10 years later, there are still friends that just don't seem to remember that I don't drink.

00:27:45.307 --> 00:27:49.387

<v SOPHIE>Yeah, and I can really relate to what Amy said about taking medication whilst drinking.

00:27:50.807 --> 00:27:55.227

<v SOPHIE>Obviously, I'm a uni student, and the pressure that came with going to socials.

00:27:55.527 --> 00:27:57.767

<v SOPHIE>I was part of a sports club, so we'd go out.

00:27:57.767 --> 00:27:59.307

<v SOPHIE>People would be like, well, aren't you drinking?

00:27:59.627 --> 00:28:04.887

<v SOPHIE>And then I'd get myself into situations where I would then drink and then become quite unwell because of the medication I was on.

00:28:04.887 --> 00:28:10.647

<v SOPHIE>And it kind of just became a bit of a spiral, and I had to kind of take myself back and think, I need to put my mental health first.

00:28:10.767 --> 00:28:12.647

<v SOPHIE>Drinking made me more anxious.

00:28:12.667 --> 00:28:15.587

<v SOPHIE>It made me say and do things that weren't, you know.

00:28:15.607 --> 00:28:19.827

<v SOPHIE>And yeah, I just think it's important to kind of recognise that kind of link.

00:28:19.847 --> 00:28:22.567

<v AMY>When I went to uni, that was like over 200 societies.

00:28:22.707 --> 00:28:30.067

<v AMY>And I didn't realise that there was so much other things going on in Freshers Week as well, other than the traditional nights out or whatever.

00:28:30.087 --> 00:28:31.947

<v AMY>There was a high on life society.

00:28:32.247 --> 00:28:35.467

<v AMY>And I thought, oh, not that there's anything wrong with this, but it's just gonna be nice.

00:28:35.487 --> 00:28:38.947

<v AMY>People sitting, playing board games, and no one's gonna have anything in common with me.

00:28:38.967 --> 00:28:44.827

<v AMY>And I realised actually, there are girls that like going out for hikes, and going pottery painting, and just doing normal things.

00:28:45.327 --> 00:28:47.087

<v AMY>And actually, there will be people like you.

00:28:47.107 --> 00:28:48.047

<v SOPHIE>Because you mentioned Dr.

00:28:48.067 --> 00:28:49.107

<v SOPHIE>Alice George as well.

00:28:49.527 --> 00:28:54.267

<v SOPHIE>And he actually talks about his ADHD that he has and his medication that he takes.

00:28:54.407 --> 00:28:56.387

<v SOPHIE>And he's actually stopped drinking now.

00:28:56.807 --> 00:29:02.627

<v SOPHIE>And he does really good kind of stories, Instagram reels about how he feels so much better not drinking anymore.

00:29:02.727 --> 00:29:09.587

<v SOPHIE>And I thought that was really empowering because it's like you've seen him take control of the things that were making him feel worse or anxious.

00:29:09.587 --> 00:29:11.187

<v SOPHIE>And he's kind of turned that around.

00:29:11.627 --> 00:29:13.467

<v SOPHIE>And now he's like really into running.

00:29:13.487 --> 00:29:14.767

<v SOPHIE>He's really into different things.

00:29:15.167 --> 00:29:19.047

<v SOPHIE>And for me, it kind of made me feel, I don't have to follow the crowd.

00:29:19.067 --> 00:29:20.687

<v SOPHIE>I don't have to drink if I don't want to.

00:29:21.027 --> 00:29:23.227

<v SOPHIE>I can go out, get into my running more.

00:29:23.247 --> 00:29:31.067

<v SOPHIE>And I just think it's really powerful to have advocates on social media and online to be able to relate to them and kind of see, well, they're doing this.

00:29:31.087 --> 00:29:32.087

<v SOPHIE>Maybe I can do that.

00:29:32.107 --> 00:29:38.507

<v SOPHIE>So I guess that's kind of helped the stigma as well because we're now seeing more people struggling with similar things.

00:29:38.867 --> 00:29:42.047

<v AMY>Yeah, I think curating who you follow is really important.

00:29:43.207 --> 00:29:45.767

<v AMY>When I went to uni, I still had all the people that I went to school with.

00:29:45.767 --> 00:29:50.967

<v AMY>And there are some people that I wanted to stay in touch with, but I had this whole thing of shoulds, like, oh, I should be doing this.

00:29:50.967 --> 00:29:55.507

<v AMY>And my therapist band should and must because they're like, you need to stop comparing yourself.

00:29:55.727 --> 00:30:14.027

<v AMY>And actually, when I kind of went through who I followed and then thought about it, social media became such a healthier, such more of a healthier place for me because I was following people that were doing things that I was interested in and passionate about and not constantly making those comparisons between a lifestyle that I didn't even want but felt like I needed to desire.

00:30:14.267 --> 00:30:14.647

<v GINYA>Right.

00:30:14.967 --> 00:30:18.567

<v GINYA>Yeah, I think figuring out what it is you want is the key.

00:30:18.847 --> 00:30:28.467

<v GINYA>I also think like, I'm so glad you guys brought up the substance use like angle because I think that is like a huge part of what a lot of people are trying to navigate in youth.

00:30:28.487 --> 00:30:39.687

<v GINYA>Like I don't think it, I mean, it obviously continues throughout life, but I think this is like a time in your life where there's a big expectation around that or the ways that people socialize is often around substance use.

00:30:40.167 --> 00:30:53.827

<v GINYA>And like, for example, I have never been on medication, but I think one of the things that has been best for my mental health is leaning more into sobriety or like trying to at least be aware of, do I actually want this right now versus do I think that I'm supposed to have this or everyone else is doing this?

00:30:54.247 --> 00:30:58.447

<v GINYA>And also just paying attention to the way I feel after or before things and being like more mindful.

00:30:58.747 --> 00:31:02.867

<v GINYA>But I think like that is a definitely a part of this like toolbox of mental health.

00:31:02.887 --> 00:31:09.387

<v GINYA>And I think it's not acknowledged enough that that has a huge impact on like drinking will impact the way that you feel about your life in the next day.

00:31:09.407 --> 00:31:15.547

<v GINYA>And like you were saying also like on your self esteem, right, like the way that you feel like you present in the world and what you're putting out there.

00:31:15.567 --> 00:31:18.107

<v GINYA>I think it's like, yeah, a huge piece of the puzzle.

00:31:18.127 --> 00:31:21.487

<v GINYA>So I'm glad that came up too.

00:31:22.967 --> 00:31:30.227

<v GINYA>Before we wrap up, it's important to emphasize not to change any of your medication use on the basis of general advice or anything you've heard here today.

00:31:30.687 --> 00:31:33.127

<v GINYA>Definitely consult your doctor with any questions that arise.

00:31:33.647 --> 00:31:35.287

<v GINYA>Everyone's situation is specific.

00:31:36.887 --> 00:31:40.627

<v GINYA>I guess you've kind of already given us some really nice takeaways here.

00:31:40.647 --> 00:31:50.547

<v GINYA>I feel like we've had a lot of very tangible things and perspectives, but do either of you have a final point you want to add or something that you haven't said or just a nugget to hold on to?

00:31:50.607 --> 00:31:52.387

<v AMY>I think just be kind to yourself.

00:31:52.447 --> 00:31:58.707

<v AMY>It sounds silly and it's something that we hear all the time, but it's so much easier to react kindly to others.

00:31:59.027 --> 00:32:03.447

<v AMY>And then when you flip that and think about the advice that you give yourselves, you know, we're our own worst critics.

00:32:03.967 --> 00:32:09.167

<v AMY>So whatever decisions that you make and obviously, you know, insult people around you, you know, friends, family, obviously your GP.

00:32:09.207 --> 00:32:11.847

<v AMY>But what's right for you is what's right for you.

00:32:12.207 --> 00:32:13.987

<v AMY>And only you can make that decision, so.

00:32:14.487 --> 00:32:15.427

<v SOPHIE>Yeah, and I agree.

00:32:15.447 --> 00:32:18.567

<v SOPHIE>Just remember that seeking help is not a bad thing.

00:32:18.587 --> 00:32:19.667

<v SOPHIE>It doesn't make you weak.

00:32:20.007 --> 00:32:23.427

<v SOPHIE>In some ways, it's empowering because you can take back that control.

00:32:23.447 --> 00:32:24.907

<v SOPHIE>For me, it's changed my life.

00:32:24.947 --> 00:32:31.507

<v SOPHIE>And the other thing I would say is weigh up the costs and benefits and make sure you work with your doctor to pick what's right for you.

00:32:31.827 --> 00:32:37.547

<v SOPHIE>But yeah, the main message I would give is seek help if you need it and don't be ashamed to do that.

00:32:38.267 --> 00:32:38.807

<v GINYA>Amazing.

00:32:38.827 --> 00:32:41.867

<v GINYA>I think great points to follow on from.

00:32:42.787 --> 00:32:49.927

<v GINYA>Just as a fun way to finish things off, I love, Sophie, how much you were referring to kind of like your self-care routine.

00:32:49.947 --> 00:32:53.967

<v GINYA>So I was wondering if you could both tell me a favorite part of your self-care routine, right?

00:32:55.227 --> 00:33:01.567

<v AMY>I think my favorite part would be at any time spent with my dog, I'm really lucky to it, to have a family pet.

00:33:01.807 --> 00:33:08.707

<v AMY>And yeah, just every day getting home, even if I've only been out for like half an hour, the enthusiastic welcome is lovely.

00:33:09.547 --> 00:33:14.287

<v AMY>So yeah, just putting the phone down for a minute and being in the present is really important.

00:33:14.867 --> 00:33:17.127

<v SOPHIE>Yeah, I agree, pets are the best.

00:33:17.847 --> 00:33:21.167

<v SOPHIE>I don't see my dog as much because they're at my parents, but I do miss her a lot.

00:33:21.187 --> 00:33:24.487

<v SOPHIE>But for me, I've started getting into running now again.

00:33:24.967 --> 00:33:28.067

<v SOPHIE>I used to really enjoy it when I was a couple years younger.

00:33:28.147 --> 00:33:30.047

<v SOPHIE>So the other day I went for a run in the rain.

00:33:30.067 --> 00:33:32.247

<v SOPHIE>I had the endorphins afterwards.

00:33:32.247 --> 00:33:33.367

<v SOPHIE>It just felt amazing.

00:33:33.467 --> 00:33:36.747

<v SOPHIE>And I wanna just keep that up because it gave me such a powerful feeling.

00:33:37.147 --> 00:33:40.467

<v SOPHIE>So yeah, I'm gonna try keep that as part of my self-care routine.

00:33:41.067 --> 00:33:42.247

<v GINYA>Yeah, I think that's a great one.

00:33:42.387 --> 00:33:46.807

<v GINYA>I have felt a lot of regaining a lot of control through running as well and power.

00:33:47.167 --> 00:33:54.987

<v GINYA>I think for me right now, which is terrible for my budget, but I light a candle almost every night while I'm reading before bed.

00:33:55.287 --> 00:34:02.527

<v GINYA>And I just like, I love the like turning off the main lights, putting on like my little lights and lighting the candle and just like the ritual of it.

00:34:02.547 --> 00:34:09.807

<v GINYA>I think that has really helped me like care more about self-care to think of it as this like nice order of things that I give to my life.

00:34:09.967 --> 00:34:11.987

<v GINYA>This has been such a lovely conversation.

00:34:12.007 --> 00:34:15.287

<v GINYA>It's so nice to both get to talk to both of you more.

00:34:15.587 --> 00:34:27.867

<v GINYA>But also I think like, I always forget how much like lighter I feel after just talking with people and like hearing them be real about the experiences that they have as a human who's existing in the complex ways of existing.

00:34:28.087 --> 00:34:29.367

<v GINYA>So thank you so much for coming.

00:34:31.767 --> 00:34:35.507

<v GINYA>Thank you for listening to the first episode of season two of Stigma to Strength.

00:34:36.007 --> 00:34:40.247

<v GINYA>We hope you'll spread the word if you're enjoying the show so far and that you'll join us next time.

00:34:40.987 --> 00:34:44.687

<v GINYA>Try your best to stay young and fun and on top of your mental health until then.