

# My Struggle with Mental Health: Amy Steele

My name is Amy Steele, a 30 year old graphic designer at Funky Pigeon, and here is my story on my struggle with mental health. I'm publishing my story to help raise awareness for mental health and to try to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health as an illness. As part of this I have created a ['Believe in Happy'](#) campaign to help people through mental health issues and to encourage people to treat a mental health illness the same as a physical illness.

## Background

Just over a year ago, I gave birth to my little girl, Madison. During my pregnancy I didn't feel great, physically or mentally. I wasn't happy about being pregnant at all and however much I tried, I just couldn't get excited about the arrival of our baby. Instead, all I felt was an impending sense of doom and a feeling that my life was now over. Obviously I didn't share how I was feeling with my family and friends as I thought they would judge me.

I started to believe that I could no longer participate in the things I love doing and would lose my identity and become 'just' a mum. I ended up tormenting myself with feelings of guilt as there are so many people that want children and can't have them, yet there I was dreading becoming a mother. I also started to believe that everybody hated me, even my family and friends so I began to withdraw socially, declining any invitation to go out. I didn't think that I was worth listening to and that people would find me annoying, boring or weird, so I stopped joining in on conversations and just kept quiet.

When I did talk to people I would over analyse every word that I'd said and become paranoid that I'd said the wrong thing or offended people. I felt very low. The doctor ended up prescribing me anti-depressants during my pregnancy but I chose not to take them. I didn't think there was anything medically wrong with me, I just thought I was being selfish and pathetic and needed to 'man up.'

## The Pregnancy

I have always suffered badly with Insomnia which added to my low mood, but being pregnant just made it a lot worse! Especially near the end when I became huge and uncomfortable. My due date came and went and still I felt nothing. I kept thinking to myself 'everything will be OK once she's out, I'll snap out of this and be so happy and full of love', but unfortunately that didn't happen.

Eventually, I had to go in to hospital to have a scan because I was two weeks overdue. The scan showed that the amniotic fluid was very low and the baby needed to come out ASAP. I was taken onto the induction ward where I was induced. Every check from the midwife showed that things still weren't progressing and I was beginning to get very disheartened as well as extremely uncomfortable and sore.

I was in hospital for 48 hours with no sleep due to the constant tests and checks I was given plus the horrifying sounds of women going into labour next to me and scaring the life out of me. Eventually, I started having contractions around early evening and by 2am I was in the delivery suite.

I found the birth exhausting and extremely hard work but nothing that I didn't expect. She was eventually born at 4:30am.

As I was handed my baby I felt a huge sense of relief that the birth was over. I waited for the rush of love to flood in but it didn't come. I told myself that I loved her over and over again but I *felt* nothing?!

During the birth I had to have an episiotomy and I tore badly causing me to haemorrhage and lose two litres of blood. Physically I felt very weak, exhausted and headachy but I just assumed that this is how every new mother feels. I couldn't believe that women were expected to take care of a new tiny person feeling like this.

The first night in hospital was horrible. I felt like I was having an out of body experience. My husband wasn't allowed to stay with me so I felt unbelievably overwhelmed and alone, even though I was on a ward with four other women (and their screaming new-borns!). I just kept thinking that all I wanted to do was run away and escape all of my new responsibilities and be on my own.

Then I would look down at my innocent, tiny baby and feel guilty and sob uncontrollably. All Maddie wanted to do was feed and I was struggling with breastfeeding. I had a horrible, claustrophobic feeling that this was my life now. It felt like a physical weight pressing down on my chest. I didn't recognise the disgusting body that now belonged to me and I felt an overwhelming sense of regret at becoming a parent.

The nurses took Maddie away from me because they wanted me to sleep but I still couldn't sleep despite how exhausted I felt. All of the emotions that I was feeling were eating me up inside. I was fighting an internal battle and trying to put on the 'deliriously happy new mummy' act.

My husband Sean arrived back in hospital in the morning and all I was thinking was 'cool, now take this baby away from me so I can go and be by myself', but I couldn't, because she needed me for my milk. There was that claustrophobic feeling again.

Sean was desperate for us to come home and even though I said I wanted to go home (because that's what I *SHOULD* have wanted right?!) I didn't quite feel ready to leave the safety of the ward just yet. I told myself to get on with it and asked to be discharged.

## Arriving Home

We arrived home around 7:30pm and already I was being bombarded with messages and calls from family and friends saying they'll be popping over during the next few days. I found this exhausting and overwhelming. I obviously said that they could visit because I didn't want to disappoint anyone. I was putting myself last like I always did.

That night was one of the worst of my life. Maddie just would not settle. I was finding it difficult to get her to latch on and she was becoming very frustrated, screaming her head off. We stayed in the living room that night and it looked like a bomb had hit it. I had every single baby blanket and bedding out as I was convinced she was too hot one minute and then too cold the next. I had been awake for over 96 hours at this point and all I wanted to do was lie down and try and sleep but I was really on edge, convinced that my lack of mothering skills would result in Maddie dying! I was frantically googling EVERYTHING and making myself worse. I hated being a mum and I'd only been one for two days! That sick, desperate feeling kept creeping in and eventually at around 4am I started crying uncontrollably, saying that I couldn't do it and I wanted to kill myself. I just wanted it all to go away and I could only see one way out. Maddie deserved a better Mum than me.

Sean shouted at me saying I was 'being stupid' and he was going to Asda to buy some formula so he could feed the baby and I could get some sleep. He seemed to think that a simple kip would solve

everything. As he left for the shops he shouted at me again saying 'can I trust you with Maddie for five minutes?! This made me feel 100x worse than I already did. I sobbed and sobbed whilst he was gone and it took all of my willpower not to swallow all of the pills in the medicine cupboard.

When he returned he didn't comfort me. He just told me to go to bed. Even though I wanted to go to bed, I was torn apart with guilt and felt like the world's worst mother and wife for leaving them to go and have a lie down. I forced myself to climb into bed and sobbed myself to sleep. I managed to get four hours sleep.

The next morning I went downstairs to find Sean and Maddie asleep on the sofa. I stared at her for ages trying to get it into my head that she was mine and I should be feeling over the moon and completely loved up. I obviously cared for her and felt a sense of duty towards her but I didn't feel like I had the 'bond' with her that everybody always went on about. I felt flat and very pessimistic about the future.

She woke up and I breastfed her which was still difficult and painful but I felt like I had to do it. I felt like an empty shell. I couldn't even summon the energy to get dressed. My grandparents, mum and sister descended on us at around midday and I held it together for approximately five minutes. My mum and grandad were bickering about where he had parked and I found it extremely irritating and irrelevant. I just sat on the sofa with tears silently streaming down my face. My sister looked at me and asked if I was OK and I screamed: "I CAN'T DO IT, I CAN'T DO IT, I CAN'T DO IT!!!"

I couldn't stop crying however hard I tried. My family were telling me it was just 'third day blues', I'll feel better soon and they felt the same when they had their babies. All I could think was 'why on earth do women have more than one baby if it feels this bad?!

Friday night was just as bad as the night before and once again my thoughts turned to suicide. It was becoming my 'comfort blanket' knowing that I could just end it all at any moment and escape this turmoil.

On Saturday morning the midwife came to the house for our check-up. Once again I couldn't control my tears and I was told that it was 'third day blues'. She asked me how the first two nights at home had gone, so I told her that I was scared that I was going to accidentally kill Maddie from my lack of expertise and I didn't want to be a mum anymore. She looked at me and said "go and pack a bag for yourself and one for Maddie, you're going back into hospital."

I was extremely hard on myself about going back into hospital as I felt that I let Sean down and that I was wasting everybody's time. I knew how much Sean hated hospitals and he wasn't pleased at all about us going back in, which added to my growing guilt.

## Arriving Back in Hospital

We arrived back at the central delivery suite on Saturday afternoon and I was told that how I was feeling was 'normal' and I was going through the 'third day blues' (again!) I was told to try and sleep whilst the midwives looked after the baby. I felt so stupid for taking up these people's time when apparently I was just tired and every new mum feels this bad.

I was so on edge and anxious that there was no way I was able to sleep. I felt like my body didn't belong to me and my mind was a mess. I was starting to realise that this wasn't just 'baby blues' or 'lack of sleep,' I wanted to die. Like, actually end my own life right that second. I'd been back in hospital for about four hours in which time my parents had popped in to see us. Once again I felt like

I had to put on a brave face for their sake. My mum asked me if I'd been checked out and if I was OK? I said: "Yes, I'm OK physically", to which she replied: "Oh, it's all in your head then, that's OK."

I know now that she didn't mean it but that sentence was very damaging at the time. I was already feeling guilty and pathetic and that just made me feel like I should be able to 'snap out of it'. I couldn't bear it any longer. I was a disappointment, a failure, a let-down! Once my parents had left, the midwife came to check on me and I just kept asking her over and over again to end my life. I was sobbing, sweating and writhing, saying: "please let me die, just please let me die!"

It was all a bit of a blur after that. A flurry of doctors and nurses came to see me to offer me words of advice and comfort, telling me that everything was going to be OK. Of course I didn't believe them. I was moved into another room with beds set up for Sean and Maddie and I felt like I had reverted back to being a child again. I felt vulnerable and very unable to function as an adult let alone a parent.

Every little thing was a struggle; eating, drinking, breathing! The midwives were fantastic and treated me with child's gloves. They fed me, bathed me and looked after Maddie for me. They gave me calming massages with lavender oil to try and reduce my anxiety but nothing would make me relax. I felt so guilty having a massage whilst my baby needed me. I still couldn't sleep that night knowing I'd inflicted this on Sean and Maddie; I hated myself for being so weak.

The midwife on duty during the next day was very busy helping people to give birth so I was left alone for long periods of time. I felt so guilty for taking up these midwives precious time. I felt so unbelievably low and desperate. I wanted to escape. I didn't want to be around Sean and Maddie as the guilt was unbearable. I couldn't look at my phone and I didn't want to talk to anyone. I didn't know what I wanted!

The only thing I knew was that this was the worst feeling I had ever felt in my entire life and I couldn't see it getting any better. I hated myself, I hated being a mum and I hated being a wife. I believed that my family hated me and thought I was a weak, pathetic, attention seeking idiot. I was tired of living, tired of caring so much about what others thought of me and tired of hating myself so much. Sean and Maddie would be so much better off without me, all I was doing was bringing them unnecessary stress.

It became evening and I could hear the midwives chatting outside in the communal area. They were having their handover so I knew I'd be meeting another new midwife soon. Maddie was asleep in her crib and Sean was in the loo. All of a sudden I felt an eerie sense of calm. I picked up my box of Clexane injections and bolted for the door. I don't know where I was going but all I knew was that I had to get out and end this pain once and for all.

I tried to run for the hospital exit but was tackled by the new midwife on duty. She bundled me into another room and clung onto me so tight whilst I sobbed uncontrollably. She stroked my hair and sprinkled lavender oil on me, waiting patiently until I calmed down enough to talk. I told her I couldn't be around Sean or Maddie and I just wanted to die.

I wasn't aware of this at the time but she had contacted the South Gloucestershire Intensive Team for help and advice. I was then sectioned under section four of the Mental Health Act for my own safety. This meant I couldn't leave the hospital for 72 hours and had to be assessed by doctors.

She set up a bed for me on the floor in the room next door to Sean and Maddie. She made it as relaxing and calm as possible and said that I could see Maddie whenever I felt like it, or not. That

night she gave me a sedative and slept on the floor with me. She was amazing and I owe my life to her.

## The Next Day

The next day was a blur. I had another new midwife looking after me and she was equally as amazing as the one before; I clung to her as if she was family. She took all of my responsibilities away from me so I didn't have to think about a thing, I just had to exist for the time being. She was so kind and caring that I cried even more. I felt I didn't deserve to be looked after.

She sat with me and held my hand as I was assessed by doctors and psychiatrists. I found it extremely hard to talk about how I was feeling. I wanted to pretend that everything was OK just so I didn't put Sean and Maddie through any more stress, but I literally had no energy left. After I had been assessed, it was decided that I was very unwell and needed to stay in hospital. I thought 'Great, Sean's going to hate me.' What I didn't know however, was that Maddie and I needed to be placed in a mother and baby unit and the only space available in the UK was a three hour drive away!

I was devastated and petrified! I thought I'd rather be dead and why wouldn't they just let me die?! I didn't even have time to think, transport was arranged and I was escorted by 4 strangers up to Nottingham. I was inconsolable and had to be sedated for the journey. The midwife stayed and made sure I was safely on the bus and then watched as we drove off. I just wanted to stay with her; I didn't want to leave Bristol or the lovely, comforting midwives at Southmead.

## Nottingham

Sean was allowed to ride up to Nottingham with us but had to return home with the escorts. We arrived at the hospital at around midnight and I was so scared. It felt like a prison. I was put in a tiny room with plastic bedsheets, a really noisy tap and windows in the door so I could be monitored. It was stiflingly hot in my room as well which made it very uncomfortable. I clung to Sean and sobbed as he left, I was then assessed by a doctor at 1am. Exhausted, distraught and drowsy from the sedative, I can't even remember what was said during that assessment but I was sectioned again. This time under section two which meant I could be detained for up to 28 days.

All I wanted to do was sleep off the sedative but I was on a 10 minute watch, which meant every 10 minutes I would get a torch shone in my face through the window in the door to check I was still alive. I tossed and turned, getting stuck to the plastic bed sheets as it was unbearably hot. I cried myself to sleep in the end, feeling like I was stuck in a nightmare.

I know that I was sent there to be helped but I felt it made me worse. It was a stark contrast to the comfort and safety of Southmead Hospital. I was constantly on edge and clung to Maddie for dear life as she was the only family I had there; I felt as if I was wading through tar. I only had the pyjamas that I had arrived in plus a few bits for Maddie. I felt like a disgusting, sweaty, horrible mess and I was still extremely sore because of my stitches and everything was hard work. I kept trying to be encouraged to socialise with the other patients but I just wanted to be on my own.

Every second felt like an hour in there, so the thought of staying there for another 28 days was excruciating. I wasn't allowed out of the unit or hospital unless I had a chaperone. I rang my dad in tears and he said he would help me 'get out' so I could come home and get the help I needed there.

I couldn't even go to the toilet without someone knocking on the door to check on me. Don't get me wrong, I understand that I was there for a very good reason and it helps a lot of people get better but personally, I felt like I was in prison.

My Dad told me that the staff would be watching my every move so I had to show them I was OK and able to take care of Maddie by myself. I was far from OK but thought 'I've been pretending this long so what's another few weeks?' I desperately wanted to get out but at the same time I didn't know where I wanted to go; I felt lost. I felt like I had to get out as that's what Sean and my dad wanted, but what would happen then? Would everything go back to square one and I'd feel like this for the rest of my life?

I did as my Dad said and quietly went about my days clinging onto Maddie, feeding her and feeding myself, even though I wasn't hungry, showing them I was 'fine' whilst silently dying inside. As soon as I had a second to myself, I would sob my heart out. I became extremely paranoid whilst I was in there... I was convinced that there were hidden cameras and microphones in my room and that the staff were 'onto me' about my plan to escape. I had a constant headache from the feeling of walking on eggshells all the time and pretending I was fine. I didn't want to shed a single tear in front of them as I was scared that would 'go against me', and I would annoy/disappoint Sean and my dad if I didn't get out.

Sean managed to get a place to stay in Nottingham so he brought me some clothes and make up from home. My sister had also given him some goodies for me. These meant the absolute world as it showed that she cared about me and that I wasn't a burden; I was actually loved even though I thought I wasn't.

I couldn't look at my phone as it was a massive trigger for my anxiety but when I did look, I had an abundance of messages and missed calls from my closest friends and family. I thought maybe they didn't hate me after all? My sister would send me huge, long messages with words of support and advice and I felt like she'd really taken the time to listen to me and not just brush off how I was feeling. She seemed to really understand what I was going through and made me feel like it was OK to not be OK.

I started to believe that just maybe, people would miss me if I disappeared. Not everyone, but my dad and my sister perhaps? Something inside of me snapped and I knew I had to help myself. I wanted to get better; I couldn't die and leave my daughter without a mother, even a rubbish one like me.

I told the staff that I wanted to leave and they pretty much laughed at me (that's how it felt anyway). I wasn't going anywhere because I was detained under the mental health act. I had to wait until Thursday when everybody had their assessments from the psychiatrist. I felt sick to my stomach at the thought of staying there a minute longer. Sean needed to go back to Bristol soon and we both had high hopes that I would be going with him.

I forced myself to have a shower, get dressed and do my hair and make-up. I was determined to get out, so I continued putting on a show.

The day of the assessment came and I couldn't sleep or eat as I was so anxious. One of the staff members on duty kept trying to tell me that I probably wouldn't be going home that day and she would get me moved to a better room. I didn't even want to think about the possibility of not going home but they kept me waiting all day, which was torturous. When it was eventually my turn to be

seen, I sat down with Maddie on my lap and Sean by my side, petrified that I would say the wrong thing and disappoint everyone. I was shaking like a leaf as she asked me all sorts of questions.

Eventually, she agreed to let me go on 'home leave', which meant I wasn't being fully discharged and would need another assessment in five days' time, plus daily home visits from the South Gloucestershire Intensive Team.

## Returning Home

The relief was immense. I packed my things and walked out the door with Sean and Maddie. Sitting in the car, the enormity of what had happened, plus the pressure of pretending everything was OK hit me like a ton of bricks. I think Sean thought that everything was going to be fine now because I was out but I felt absolutely terrible. We needed to stop a few times because Maddie needed feeding; I hated it. I still had that claustrophobic feeling and felt extremely desperate and lost. What now? I was out and thought I would be over the moon but no? I sat in the back of the car and thought of every single way that I could end my life. I rang my dad and sobbed so much. His voice comforted me and I just wanted to be with him.

I felt I didn't want to be around Sean because I was not behaving like the woman he fell in love with. I could sense the stress and disappointment that I was posing on him. He didn't understand my illness and I felt huge pressure to 'get better' for him. His words 'I just want my wife back,' made me feel so guilty. I knew deep down that I had to get better and I couldn't if I was with Sean. So I moved into my parent's house with Maddie. I didn't even want to set foot in our house as I associated it with how I felt before going back into hospital; it was a huge trigger for my anxiety and depression.

The crisis team came to my parents' house the next day and they were amazing. I was petrified to tell them how I really felt in case they sent me back to the MBU, but the team doctor understood exactly how I was feeling and assured me that was last thing they wanted to do. The doctor told me that he was the person who first spoke to the midwife about my case in hospital and made me feel like he really cared about me. I was prescribed Sertraline which was delivered to my parents' house and monitored regularly.

I became very distant from Maddie and didn't want to be near her. Every little sound or movement she made triggered my anxiety and I had to go into another room; I begged my mum and dad to adopt her. I was still receiving congratulations cards and I couldn't even look at them as I didn't want a single reminder that I was a parent.

My parents helped me through that time immensely. My mum would take care of Maddie and do the night feeds for me so I could try and establish a sleep routine again, and my Dad was my councillor. The guilt that I was 'burdening' my parents with this responsibility was immense. I was also constantly telling myself that my life was good, I was lucky and so many people have it worse. But that just added to the guilt - you cannot talk yourself out of depression. Just like you cannot talk yourself out of having the flu or a broken leg. It is an illness.

I was told that I needed to go back to Nottingham for my next assessment but I flat out refused and in the end they agreed to do it over the phone. I told them that I had an excellent support network in place at my parents and the crisis team were helping me a lot. They discharged me; I was so relieved that I wouldn't have to go back there.

## Recovering

I would start every day feeling flat but OK. Then the anxiety and darkness would creep in like poison and at around 4pm I would be inconsolable again. I would spend all day waiting for my dad to come home from work, just so he could sit on the sofa with me while I cried and told him how much I wanted to die. I didn't want to go out but I didn't particularly enjoy staying in either. I was physically and mentally exhausted even though I wasn't doing much apart from existing. I had no appetite and only ate because I was made to. I didn't enjoy any of the things that used to make me happy and nothing excited me anymore. I felt like I was living in a deep, dark hole and there was no way out. Making any sort of decision was difficult; I didn't like thinking about the future as it seemed so dark and drab. Who was I? What had I become? I used to love life and enjoy the little things. I used to laugh and have fun but I couldn't remember the last time I'd genuinely laughed or enjoyed something.

I fell into a routine of waking up around 4am and waiting for my mum to bring Maddie into my room so I could breastfeed her. I would always wish that she would hurry up and finish but she would feed for over an hour each time; I felt so trapped. I would then go and sit with my dad before he went to work.

One morning I woke feeling extremely panicky and anxious. I could hear my Dad leaving for work and I was in a blind panic. I'd actually slept past 4am and my morning routine was all out of sync! I chased him out of the door barefoot and in my pyjamas because I didn't want him to leave me! He gave me a hug and tried to calm me down but he had to go to work. I was literally inconsolable until he returned later that day. I was so sick of feeling this way and I still can't believe how patient my dad was with me, even though I would cry and say the same things over and over.

I relied heavily on my parents and my sister during this time, and slowly I learned to let go of the guilt I was feeling and let them help me. Once I admitted to myself that I had an illness and it wasn't my fault, I was able to really begin my recovery. Plus the high dose of anti-depressants I was taking had started to take effect.

## Progress

The help I received was overwhelming and I am eternally grateful. I was taught how to deal with my anxiety and depression, and given helpful tools to get me through including breathing exercises and relaxation techniques. I was introduced to groups such as 'Mother's for Mother's' and 'Bluebell' who really help people suffering with post-natal depression.

One day, I received a bunch of flowers from my next door neighbour and I was so touched that what I was going through was being recognised as an illness. My grandma also sent me a get well soon card and when my doctor came to visit, he saw it and said 'I wish more people would send cards for mental illness, they can really help.'

As I began to feel stronger physically and mentally, I would force myself to do little things like make myself breakfast and get dressed. A small task that gets taken for granted by most but a monumental achievement for someone suffering from severe depression. I would add another small task to my routine each day until they eventually became second nature again. I didn't want praise or attention for my small victories but the fact that I was getting it from my parents and mental health team spurred me on even more. I was determined to overcome this illness.

My health visitor was also very supportive and understanding and made me feel like it was OK to give up breastfeeding. I felt like a massive weight had been lifted and didn't feel so 'tied down' with having to feed and express all the time. Knowing that once she'd finished her bottle she was going to

be satisfied really helped; I knew there was an end to the feed instead of her just staying attached to me for hours! I felt like I could maybe try going out somewhere now that I wasn't worrying about feeding in public. What a revelation!

I started going for short walks around the village with Sean and Maddie when he came to visit. She would sleep peacefully and the fresh air and exercise really cleared away the cobwebs. I also started writing a journal and documented every single thing that I was feeling at that precise moment. It really helped to get the bad feelings out.

Another mindfulness activity that I love doing is filling out a 'gratitude journal.' I would literally write down all of the things that I used to love and made me happy. Fresh bedding, doughnuts, coffee, long walks, prosecco and more. For some reason, writing these simple things down gave me comfort and a flicker of hope that I would one day enjoy them again.

## Going 'Home' Home

I decided to try spending the night at home after a couple of months of living at my parents. I was surprised to discover that I felt OK about it. I started splitting my time between my parents' house and my house until I'd eventually moved fully back into my house.

I was still under the care of the crisis team but the visits had lessened, though they called me every day to check in. Slowly but surely, thoughts of suicide became a lot less frequent and my emotions levelled out. I was trying so hard to bond with Maddie and started taking her out for long walks all by myself. This doesn't seem like a big deal to most people but I was so proud of myself. The walks turned into a visit to the shops and a coffee, then one day it dawned on me that I was actually enjoying spending time with my daughter instead of fearing it.

I will always remember the very first time that I stopped and thought 'I'm going to be OK.' I was out walking with Maddie and it was a beautiful sunny day. It was so quiet and peaceful and I could hear the birds chirping away. I felt a little flutter in my stomach when I looked down at my beautiful daughter staring up at the sky. I felt OK, in fact, I felt good! I cried again but with tears of happiness and relief. I finally felt like the clouds were clearing and I was climbing out of the hole I was in.

The crisis team discharged me and I was introduced to my recovery worker, Jaki. Her job is to help keep me safe and to help me through the stresses of everyday life. I am still under the care of the recovery team now. Recovery isn't a straight forward process. When I started to feel better and then had a dip in my mood again, I would feel like a failure and be hard on myself. It was explained to me that recovery is very much like a rollercoaster and nobody is expected to feel better and stay feeling better forever.

I've had a couple of relapses over the past year including a bad one just before returning to work in October. I had only just got used to life as a new mum and was still finding it a struggle, so the thought of disrupting our routine and trying to add my job into the mix terrified me, as I'm sure it does a lot of mums returning to work.

I thought I was 'cured' though, so when the depression started to creep back in I took it really hard. I thought that I would be up and down like this for the rest of my life and I didn't want that for me or my family. I went out shopping... for painkillers... lots of them. I had to collect the pills from different shops as you are only allowed to buy a two packets at a time. Once I had a stash I thought it would be easy this time, everyone thought I was 'OK' again so no one would suspect anything.

I made my plan; I was going to drop Maddie off at my mums on a Friday and say that I had an appointment that I couldn't take her to. Sean must have picked up on the fact that I wasn't feeling well and he strongly encouraged me to go to the GP; I didn't tell him my plans but I agreed. Because of my history I was referred straight back to the primary care team and then the crisis team again. I opened up to them about my plans to take my own life as I had learnt from the previous experience that I needed to talk about it to get better. They confiscated all of the pills in our house and my anti-depressants were changed back to a weekly dispensary instead of a monthly one.

I haven't had a relapse since then and I returned to work despite being advised not to. It was hard adjusting to our new routine at first but now I am extremely pleased that I persevered. I am enjoying being at work and feeling a little more like 'me' again. I am learning to deal with dips in my mood and anxiety attacks. The tools that I have been given during my journey really help me get through them.

## Support and Final Thoughts

The overwhelming support I have received from professionals, family and friends is amazing. I'd always be so afraid to burden people with my 'problems', so I would keep them bottled up and put on a brave face. I wanted to be the strong one, the funny one, the one people relied on but it all got too much. Now I know that a problem shared is a problem halved and by talking about how I'm feeling doesn't make me weak, it actually makes me strong.

I still have 'down days' and certain 'triggers' but I'm so much healthier and happier now, plus I'm extremely proud of how far I've come this past year. I have worked hard at my recovery and kept going when all I wanted to do was disappear.

I appreciate the little things in life now and live for the moment instead of always being two steps ahead. I am besotted with my daughter and recently celebrated her first birthday with a magical unicorn party - a milestone for both of us. I am grateful beyond words for the help I have received from everyone and because of them, my daughter still has her mother. Of course, I feel guilty and sad that I wasn't quite myself during the first few months of her life but I know now that I was very unwell and needed to spend time trying to get better.

I now want to try and help others that are going through similar experiences and want to use my platform as a designer at Funky Pigeon to create meaningful cards and gifts, which can really make a difference to someone who is suffering. An idea that my doctor subconsciously gave me all those months ago.

My advice to anyone suffering is don't be afraid to ask for help! I would never have asked for help if my illness hadn't have been picked up on, but I'm so glad I did as otherwise I wouldn't be here now.

For help with mental health issues, visit the [NHS helpline list](#) or [Mind](#).

To see Amy's Believe in Happy campaign, visit <https://www.funkypigeon.com/believe-in-happy>