



# Speaking from Experience

## Young People & Mental Health

### Transcript for chapter 3 of 9: School & teachers

**Carla** – My whole life had been great, up until that point. I'd come from a really supportive family, had lots of great friends and went to great schools. My whole life was one sort of big ball of fun. Then I got to year 12 and things changed a bit for me and I don't think I had the coping skills to sort of deal with that.

**Trent** – I was averagely going to school about once per week. Because of that, I missed out on a few assignments and I missed out on my half-year examination. When I finally got my act back together, I wanted to run for school captain, and because of my poor attendance, I wasn't allowed to run.

**Raquel** – I think I managed 13 weeks [of school], and then I had to give it away. Defer it for the year and then go back this year. That made me even more depressed, because I really loved school.

**Bianca** – I didn't want to be at school. I found it too enclosed, with everyone around me. Too many people.

**Carla** – At the time, I chose not to disclose my mental illness, or discuss it with friends, family or teachers. I wanted to be treated the same as everyone else.

**Trent** – I didn't want to speak to my teachers, because there's only one who I get along with and that's in a serious class, so there's not really much time.

**Raquel** – I tell all my teachers, because they're really important to have on your side. Friendship groups, I think sometimes it doesn't need to be said because it's not all of who I am. Only my very close friends would know what's going on because they'd have my plan of action that they'd need to follow if I got even sicker.

**Carla** – My friends, once I did eventually tell them, have been great. I haven't lost any friends as a result of being open about my mental illness.

**Trent** – There would be some people at school that I would... I get along with them sometimes, but most times they're ignorant, basically. They don't really care and they just call you a slacker and other names. Because you can't do the work they think it's your own fault, when it's not.

**Raquel** – That's been my main thing this year, having good communication with school so I can reduce my stress levels there. Being able to say that I've got to step out from school for a bit, but I'll be back later, so help me fill it in.

**Carla** – People at school, including my teachers and peers, didn't understand what I was feeling, but that was because I didn't allow them to get to know that world of me. I wish I had at the time. In hindsight, it would have been a lot easier to get through year 12.



**Raquel** – I changed schools. I thought that I was a bit older and I had a bit more experience than the other girls, who would be at my old high school. So, I went to an alternate school in the city. They've been really supportive and fantastic.

**Carla** – If a teacher or student suspects another young person may have some difficulties going on at the moment, I'd recommend confronting them about it and opening the lines of communication. Even if they resist at the start, just letting them know that they're there, if they want to talk.

**Raquel** – I was really surprised because they said they said that they already knew. I they already knew, it would have been nice if they had of come up to me first and ask me first. It would have been good to have that relationship with the teachers as well.

**Sean** – A student is not going to open up to a teacher if there is no rapport built. That's the first thing. The teacher needs to establish rapport with the student. You know, they can have a little shat about the weekend or the footy, everyone loves the footy. That's when they can build that rapport and then they can introduce the issue that they would like to bring up, such as that they've noticed changes in the student's behaviour.

**Raquel** – It was really like opening the flood gates and all of my teachers were on my side and were like, "We can do this together".

**Sean** – Teachers are going to spend more time at school than they are with their families, you know. They're going to spend more time interacting with their teachers than they are with their parents, most likely. They'll go home, have their dinner, do their homework and go to bed. Otherwise, they'll sit in class all day with their teacher, and the teacher is going to be the one educating them.

**Raquel** – They're our main adult port of call. They're the ones that we know can help us, but we're too afraid to ask to help us. So, if they're more friendly then, you're more likely to go up to them and tell them if you're having a rough time, or if you need an extension, or to find somewhere to go so I can get better or refer me to the school psychologist.

**Jade** – Not everyone will have those few people who they can talk to. A teacher might be the only person that might notice that something is wrong.

**Bianca** - Teachers can look out for kids who are quiet, are on their own, or don't have many friends; just not performing well in their work, or not interested.

**Raquel** – It doesn't necessarily have to mean that they're dropping in grades, it can meant that they're improving in their grades. I know, myself, I went from a 'D' to an 'A', in a really short period of time. That was because I was searching for perfection. When I would get home, I would study for hours and hours and hours, which is unrealistic. Teachers would also be able to notice the people who are socially isolated.

**Jade** – Even if they have a little bit of background to the illnesses, so that they can recognise symptoms and behaviours that may seem not so normal... If you'd like to word it like that.

**Carla** – At school, I think students need to be encouraged to become aware of mental health, and positive mental health. Also how to look out for their own signs and symptoms



that something might be going wrong. I think they need to be encouraged to talk, not only to their peers, but to teachers and school counsellors. To understand that teachers and school counsellors are there to help and can refer you onto better services. They won't necessarily call your parents at the first given moment.

**Trent** – I would recommend people talking to their teachers. That way, they can build a common ground and a strong relationship. So, if something bad happens, like you're suffering from depression or if life sucks; they have someone to talk to other than their friends and family.