

STOMP

Richard Smith, Age 34

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It would be amazing to come and speak for NHSE and STOMP events as I feel what I have in experience is something I need to share and hopefully show how powerful mental health, autism, and medication can be and the impact it can have on someone.

My name is Richie and I was adopted at the age of three as I was abused and neglected as a baby, the abuse was that bad it was put into the local newspaper. I was removed from them and adopted into another family, this didn't end to well either. I grew up feeling unable to show my true self to them or ask for help to understand why I was feeling and acting the way I was. I felt I needed to hide my behaviours and what I did and felt.

As I was growing up I used to use house hold objects to self-regulate my sensory needs. This caused me to learn quickly about how to compress my behaviours and feelings, I now know that these were traits of my autism.

Not feeling able to be my self at home and at school lead to mental health issues in my teens. Whilst growing up I felt I was a freak, a weirdo, something not right. I looked at the other boys and girls and couldn't understand why I was different. I was scared to show my family what I didn't yet understand my self, it was a horrible way to live. Everything around me was hard to process, feeling like every day was a survival day. Lying in bed every night crying wanting to reset for the next day.

I have a lot of insight I could go into detail, but I want to jump to when my mental health state was at its lowest.

It started off with gambling, it was my way of getting a reset from the world around me, unknown about how this would affect my autism I got very obsessed with this causing me to lose a lot of money, this lead to me trying to take my own life a few times taking a large amount of pain killers and spirits. I was then assessed by the crisis team and put into mental health services. I did CBT, group therapy and one to one programs. The autism was never picked up until this year at the age of 33. While I was in the system and getting seen by mental health professionals I was on a lot of medication for depression, anxiety, anti-psychotic medication, and tablets to help me sleep. The doses of these drugs were increased over time and at one point I was on 6 different tablets at once. I got worse as things in my life also got worse and I gambled more and started to self-harm. I was out of control; my life was a mess.

While I was doing the CBT, it taught me to be very self-aware and learn why I was doing this and what it felt like. To this day I can still do this skill and I can remember a lot of feelings and behaviours of what I did years ago. I feel this allows me to understand how not only my autism was but also how I was on medication.

I strongly feel that while I was on medication I was not there in person. It was almost like an easy fix not actually dealing with the issues and I was compressing them. Masking my personality and my thoughts which in turn masked the depression. When I look at this I think it may also have masked my autism and didn't allow me to give my body the sensory intake it needed. I always had this feeling in my stomach like a washing machine, the issues were there

but were just going around and around but they never left, making one big thing in my stomach there every day.

It took away my personality and in fact because it was masking certain things it may have had an impact on getting my diagnosis earlier. It was too easy I felt for putting issues down to my adoption and treating them with medication. We never explored anything else as once I was tagged with depression, anxiety and perhaps detachment disorder the medication just fit. But it really didn't just fit, it wasn't just as easy as something you get out of a text book.

I would say that I was still aware of my thoughts and feelings in my mind, but the medication stopped me being able to show those feelings and thoughts and hinder what people saw rather than what I was thinking. I would say to balance this the medication was necessary in certain points of my journey but something that should have been reassessed at more points along the way. The medication stopped the extreme depression and anxiety, but things perhaps should have been put in place to get them reduced to a point where I started to learn how to manage my mental state better and understand where it was coming from.

It's not actually until you come off the medication you realise what you were like. On the medication at the time you can't tell what the impact was. You knew they were doing the job but just a little too much at times. I was on medication for 4-5 years and I always remember it being like a washing machine knot of clothes sitting in my stomach. When I did make the decision to ask to come off them and I took control of my own mind the knot started to go. Having people around me and a safe place to talk really helped me more and this is when I started my group therapy, this really helped a lot as the medication was reduced and I really started to get better. I wrote a diary when I was having a really hard time and its amazing to read and see how I was, it's almost shocking to see that it was really me and the way I was. Understanding anxiety at home and learning how to deal with it there and then helped lower the anxiety and depression. Having a safe family that were confident in helping me and spotting when I wasn't right also helped.

So, after a very hard 2 years waiting to see if I had autism, during this I feel that if I had not have come off medication and dealt with my issues it would not have given me the strength to get through this new adventure. I am currently medication free and am proud of this. I use sensory aids to manage my anxiety now and I use ear defenders to help me process, I still get a lot of anxiety, but I have developed aids and skills to manage this at a level but also to the point to ask for help when I need it and not feel embarrassed with my mental state. Understanding the difference of when it is autism related or if it's something else.

I worry about those that are over medicated and having difficulties that may also have autism and its not getting shown because they are dealing with what they see on the surface and not what might be a different way of thinking by the persons behaviour and expression.

A few medications I can remember I was on are as followed

- Amitriptyline
- Sertraline
- Risperidone
- Mirtazapine
- Temazepam

I have notes and photo if you need them and have my diary of my expressions when I was on medication if you feel you would like some photos etc let me know.