

Story vignettes

The following story vignettes are used to trigger case discussion. Each unit has two story vignettes to allow participants to explore issues that arise for young people with mental health and substance use issues and their families and carers from various perspectives.

The trigger questions for each story are to direct discussion and lead participants to think how they would help this person through their service and how they would access other relevant services.

Facilitators have additional discussion questions and notes for each story vignette.

- Unit one:
 - Story A: Eloise
 - Story B: Jake

Unit one

Story vignette A – Eloise

"When I wake up, it's just black. Life's just black. But I don't want to tell Mum about that or other things. If I tell her what's really going on, I know she's going to panic and go off and try to do stuff to fix it. Like, even though I'm 16, she's still into making appointments for me with her doctor and then she gets cut when I don't turn up. I try to tell her that I didn't ask her to do it and there's no way I want to get grilled by someone.

Mum doesn't listen to that. And she doesn't listen when you tell her that everything's under control. She just goes off and loses it and then the whole thing spins out and she'll end up crying and begging me to be like I was and then Dad comes home and he loses it with me for upsetting Mum. And then he starts fighting with her, himself. And then I just feel as guilty as shit.

I knew Mum was reading my diary because she was watching me all the time. And crying at the sink when she did the washing up. I write everything in my diary, so all the drug and sex stuff would have been a bit of a shock. I used to tell Dee, my best girlfriend, all those things but she OD'd and died and left me. Mum's so scared that this is going to happen to me. But I'm not scared 'cause when you OD, you don't feel anything. You don't know you're dying..."

Points for discussion

1. What are the important issues here for Eloise and her parents?
2. How would you identify and prioritise the risks that Eloise faces?
3. If Eloise was telling YOU this story, how would you engage with her?
4. What interventions are possible and who would be best to coordinate these?
5. What support could local health and community services offer at this point?
6. Could you involve the parents? How?

Unit one

Story vignette B – Jake

"I was diagnosed when I was 17. That was more than five years ago now. We were told to just accept that I'd be on meds for life and to forget about me ever being 'well'. It was pretty heavy, not just for me, but for Mum and Dad too.

One of the hardest parts is after I've had an episode. I come out of hospital with a change in my medication but not really with much information about it. Or what the side effects might be. So I go home and Mum and Dad have to deal with the new 'me' and it's guesswork for them and they basically have to play it by ear and just keep doing the stuff they know works with me. Or works best, anyway.

They're really into me keeping routines going like say, I have to get up every morning at a normal time and do something with my day. And I have to exercise. They can see the difference in me when I come back from walks, so they push all that. I hate it though. I'd do anything just to stay in bed. I volunteer three days a week in an op shop which I think is important because you're doing something of value. And you're learning how to get on with other people. If you sit at home doing nothing, you don't know how to socialise at all.

It's lonely when you're sick. You don't see many of your old friends - they don't get what's happening for you. And you miss being able to do all the stuff that other people your age do. I think that's why when I start to do well I sort of think I'm doing better than I am, and I start feeling okay about seeing my old friends again. Problem is that they all do a bit of grass and they drink and stuff and so I party with them. And I think it's all going to be okay. And then, before long, I'm not taking my meds and it always crashes down and I go backwards and it's like, 'Here I go again.'

I see a lot different doctors and services so I'm telling my story a lot and sometimes I feel like I've had enough of talking. And I don't want to talk about it anymore. I don't even know how therapy is that useful for me anyway."

Points for discussion

1. What are the important issues here for Jake?
2. What are Jake's strengths and when is he at risk?
3. If Jake was telling YOU this story, how would you engage with him? Would you involve his parents?
4. What strategies could you suggest to Jake to prevent the 'here I go again' situations?
5. What role can the general practitioner play in Jake's health care?
6. What support could other local health and community services offer at this point?