

Ignored.
Not taken seriously.
Belittled
and shushed.

These are a few words to describe the way I felt in 2020-2022 when I tried to get much needed support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

The first time I was introduced to CAMHS I was 13 and in crisis, I had been referred because I was badly self harming, had poor self image and I was living with suicidal feelings.

When I entered the CAMHS building for the first time, I noticed the cold hospital feeling that the building had. I was confused and I didn't know what was happening to me, I knew something was wrong and that I needed help.

I was willing to try whatever it took. Karen, the CAMHS practitioner assigned to me, was cold and distant. A middle aged woman who wore a covid face mask, so I was left guessing what the second half of her face looked like.

For the first session my Mum was invited, Karen asked what the problem was. When Mum and I answered the question we were met with dismissive language and advice to have a bath, calm down, take 10 or have a cup of tea.

I was struggling with extreme emotions, bulimia and depression, I had experienced some very challenging things earlier in life. When trying to express this to Karen she invalidated me and made me feel as though what I had been through wasn't that 'bad'.

When I told her I wasn't eating healthily, that I had begun to throw up my food after eating, she told me that I couldn't get specific help for an eating disorder because I didn't look sick.

Because of the lack of support my mental health continued to decline and I attempted to take my life. I was 13, at this point.

At first I didn't tell CAMHS because I knew about safeguarding.

I wasn't prepared to share what I had been doing and how I was feeling with my mum, but I knew that everytime I attempted it the chance of it working was increasing.

I knew the risk of what I was doing, and I wanted help. I didn't want to die but I didn't want to live the way I was living. I built up courage and decided to tell **CAMHS** that I had attempted suicide. She asked me if I was sure that I was doing it to end my life or if I was just doing it for attention.

When I told her I intended to stop living she changed the subject and it wasn't spoken about again.

After the session I was expecting my mum to be called and told, I was terrified and I was just waiting, anticipating my Mum's reaction. It never came because **CAMHS** never said anything to Mum. Either they didn't believe me or they didn't take me seriously.

This made me feel useless, that my struggles would not be recognised. This led to my attempts becoming more and more serious, I started attempting to overdose multiple times a week, everytime I took more than enough that was supposed to 'work'. Everytime I expected to die and everytime I didn't.

I was lucky.

After having enough of being ignored and not taken seriously, when screaming for help I started refusing to go to sessions with Karen and requested a new CAMHS practitioner.

After 6 months of no support whilst being put into foster care and being bullied in school I started developing symptoms of psychosis, I was terrified.

I tried to tell my foster carers who finally got me a new CAMHS worker. My first session with her she told me she wouldn't be any better than Karen, so I never went back.

I fought the battle all on my own at 13 years old.

I gave myself therapy and worked through my own trauma and emotions **ON MY OWN** and I got better on my own. Because **CAMHS** refused to give me the help I needed, although **CAMHS** was supposed to support me through my challenging mental health and the trauma I had experienced. I deserved the help I needed, not getting it was dangerous and unhealthy. This is the impact shitty **CAMHS** can have on struggling young people.

I am sharing my story because I want people to know what I went through, to open their eyes to the mental health struggles young people are going through and how the government's services are failing us.

I want my story to be seen and heard, I know it may be upsetting - trust me I know - but I'm sick of being ignored. I want other people that have had similar experiences to me to be seen and heard too.

My name is Beth and I am not the problem.

Places to get support

Balmy Army

In the gallery at HOME, 1 July to 17 September

factoryinternational.org/whats-on/balmy-army

Campaign Against Living Miserably

thecalmzone.net

The Samaritans

samaritans.org

Nightline Association

students' mental health support line.

nightline.ac.uk