



Who to tell that you're in therapy? And why?

Alice Ayres

Sitting on the Tube with a relatively new friend, I suddenly found myself feeling awkward in the middle of an anecdote. "And on a Thursday evening, I...I..."

I cast a sideways glance at him. How would he react? Could I trust him not to judge me negatively? In the heat of the moment, I came up with a compromise.

"I see a therapist. For, like, general life direction stuff, you know?"

I waved an airy hand. He nodded understandingly. I sat back in my seat and breathed a sigh of relief, feeling rather pleased with myself. Not only had I negotiated the tricky subject, I had portrayed myself as a forward-thinking career woman. I was going places and seeking direction! I certainly wasn't sitting at home in my dressing gown every Friday night eating Maltesers and talking to my cat. I don't believe my friend was taken in for one second, but there you go. In my mind, I got away with it.

Who can you trust?

If you're going through a tough time and [seeking help](#) for it, it can be hard to know who in your life you can trust to talk about it. Despite the excellent work being done by several charities to reduce stigma, to me, personally, it still feels like a risk. That's one reason I write this blog under a pseudonym, after all, although I'm experimenting with being more open. Encouragingly, I haven't yet had a single negative reaction (although neither has anyone said "[Anxiety](#) and [depression](#)? You? But you're always so positive and upbeat!" Perhaps I look naturally morose.)

It's a hugely personal decision, and everyone will be different. For example, despite (or perhaps because of) my [strong family history](#) of mental illness, I would rather do almost anything than talk to my family about it. Work is the other big issue, and here's another great reason to write under a pseudonym.

To disclose or not to disclose?

I have never willingly disclosed any form of mental health difficulties I have experienced to any employer I have had, even though doing so might have meant that I could have accessed additional support. I simply don't trust them not to treat me less favourably, despite legislation and everything else that might protect me. I am envious of people who can be open with their employers, but for me, it has never felt like an option.



Fortunately, my work has rarely been affected, although I've had a number of close shaves. At the start of this year, when things were really bad for me, I went through a period of waking up every single night at 3am. When it was time to get up and go to work, I experienced severe stomach cramps and crippling headaches, which never troubled me at the weekends.

My boss never spoke to me about my sickness absence record, although I remember one time when I was sitting in her office, pale and hollow-eyed from lack of sleep, staring at her, hoping she would ask me if I was OK. But she never did, and I staggered back to my desk like a dutiful zombie to fight my way through another day. I could make tea, crack jokes and just about do my job properly, but I felt numb inside. I remember thinking, "Why can't any of these people tell how bad I feel?" But of course, depression is invisible. Nobody really knows unless you tell them, but having these conversations can be incredibly difficult.

In an ideal world, everyone would be able to be open about experiencing difficulties with mental health. It's getting better, but we're not there just yet. In the meantime, though, there are people who can be trusted. If all else fails, there are always Maltesers, and my cat.

The writer of this blog is not a current or past client of any therapist presently or formerly practising at Brighton & Hove Psychotherapy. Alice Ayres is a pseudonym.