

This is Kemiko, the bonsai tree which I bought for my husband 2 years ago. When I bought her, I hadn't quite appreciated how many needs bonsai trees have, it turns out they have lots. They need a constant warm temperature, they need light, they need food and they need more water than you'd think. They need pruning, they need babysitting when you're on holidays, and despite all of this, they go through cycles where they lose their leaves and look like they are giving up. When Kemiko isn't thriving, we think about her environment, we hang on in there with her, we know she needs us to take care of her, and yet as humans, we sometimes forget to do the same for each other.

When I was 17, I was doing my A levels. I'd worked hard, I knew how to learn and was able to put effort into my work without too much difficulty. I had friends and had just learnt to drive. I was lucky to have a stable and supportive home and a family that were close. I was happy. However, the day before my first A level exam, my cousin was killed. A car mounted the pavement. He was 6. He meant the world to me and on that day, everything changed. I could no longer study. I could no longer keep my emotions in check at home or in school. I could no longer relate to my friends and their worries, or their joys, anymore. My family had fallen apart.

I answered teachers back. I was angry, I was sad, I was referred to CAMHS. A psychiatrist told me my reaction to my situation was normal. The problem wasn't within me, and the solution wasn't either. I was discharged, but without any other support. Back in school, some teachers told me I should write off the year and repeat. Some said I just had to get on with it. Some told me he was "only" a cousin after all - they didn't take any time to understand what this relationship, and the impact of loss meant to me. But one teacher did it differently. She asked how I was and was able to still be there when the answer was "not ok". She understood that my behaviour change was the only way I had to communicate that I wasn't ok. That being ok would take time. She understood that the only thing that could help was my environment and those around me adapting and changing. She understood that I needed someone to be alongside me and quietly believe I would thrive again, while I couldn't believe that for myself.

So what if, rather than seeing problems and solutions as solely being within individuals, we understand behaviour can be communication, and we enable change in environments. What if we asked each other, what we need to thrive

and found ways to enable these needs to be met. What if we sat alongside others, if we held on to hope.

The Trauma Council recently released guidance for schools in psychological well-being following a critical incident. In this document, they name 5 key principles; needs humans have and need fulfilling to feel safe again after a trauma. These are safety, psychological as well as physical, calm, connection, in control, and hope. When I read these, I thought back on what that one teacher gave me after I had experienced trauma. She gave me safety in a world that had suddenly become unsafe, yet didn't seem that way too others, she did this through making what she could predictable, through being reliable, through being open and honest with me. She was, and provided, a place of calm that I could seek out when I needed. She gave me connection with her, when other connections were difficult. She gave me a sense of control over my world that had felt in many ways completely out of my control. She held on to hope that despite the odds, I might just get through my exams, and somehow, I did, and got what I needed to go on to university. I had my highest grade in her subject, despite her never putting any pressure on me to do any work or revision after my bereavement.

And now I work in a school in a Reach Team, a team which supports teachers in a school setting in the amazing job they do. Being to other young people living through and dealing with really difficult situations, what my teacher was to me.

So, my ask of you is this. In our jobs we constantly meet people who have been through or who are going through their own critical incidents, their own traumas. Next time you meet someone who is struggling, think about what their behaviour might be communicating. Think about their environment. Do they have food, water, light, do they feel safe psychologically as well as physically? Do they have calm and how you can be that for them? Do they have connection and how can they get it? Do they have choice and how can it be enabled? And can you sit alongside them, holding onto hope, until they can take it back for themselves? Because someone doing these things for me, enabled me to be here today. Thank you.