

Video transcript of Shaista, Dave, Lilith and Olivia talking about their eating problems. They discuss their experiences of eating disorders such as anorexia, restrictive eating, bingeing and purging.

Shaista: When I first started talking about my eating disorder to people everything was choppy and nonsensical and wouldn't even, I couldn't even form sentences about it. It just sounded so trivial and it would never express exactly how I felt so I felt like I shouldn't be expressing at all.

Lilith: I think you can go for so long without talking that you lose the words. For me my eating problems and then my eating disorder developed alongside other mental health problems, which all sort of spiralled out of control when I was 17 and in my final year of sixth form. Stopped eating and started running maybe three or four hours a day because I didn't have a job, and really lost a lot of weight and found a lot of control in it, but it was making me very, very unhappy. But at dinnertime my mum was really concerned that I had lost so much weight, so made these big dinners for me to eat, and I wanted her to feel like I was better and I wanted to feel that I was well, so I'd eat them and then start purging them afterwards. And I got a job in a coffee shop, which I loved, and got happier and felt more comfortable about eating, but couldn't get out of the habit of purging after I was eating, and that kind of spiralled into patterns of bingeing and purging that carried on. I mean, you talked about family being a trigger.

Olivia: Yeah.

Lilith: But a big trigger for me is any emotional reaction to anything positive or negative. I really struggle to manage that. It overwhelms me, and a way to get back in control of

myself and almost focus attention on something other than this horrible churning gut of feeling is to engage in bingeing and purging.

Olivia: I had a restrictive eating disorder for a while, and then I...

Dave: Sorry, I've never heard that, restrictive eating disorder?

Olivia: I call it a restrictive eating disorder as opposed to anorexia because I just, I don't... It's like the anorexic mind that I have is that I wasn't thin enough to be anorexic.

Dave: Yes, no, like, I completely agree with you. Like, that's a really good point. Did you feel that you weren't ever anorexic enough to...?

Olivia: Yes, I thought I was never good enough, full stop, so therefore I wasn't thin enough. Whatever I did was never good enough, and with pressure for sixth form and for GCSE. All the work that I did wasn't good enough, getting an A star wasn't good enough. That's how my brain works.

Shaista: Whenever I speak to my friends who are suffering and they're always like, I'm challenging in this, I'm challenging that, it always made me feel a bit like a fake because I never really had that.

Dave: That's something that everyone says. Like, this is why I didn't go to therapy so long because nobody, like, you hear stories about anorexics, like, you were never anorexic enough. I couldn't, I tried, but I could never go, like, days without eating.

Olivia: Yeah.

Dave: It would always be like, you know what have you had? Well I've had... I don't want to be triggering, so I don't want to go into it. I always used to have kind of restrictive

things, kind of in-between you. It's amazing, nobody else is talking about that. That really frustrates me.

Olivia: It's different for everyone. Each individual disorder is kind of tailor-made for them, in a way.

Shaista: Yes. When I was at college once, I had a bar of chocolate and a girl came up to me and said, aren't you supposed to be anorexic?

Dave: Oh.

Shaista: I was like, are you kidding? When you do enter recovery, it's like going completely against what has been your norm for so long, and that is so difficult, and you're processing all these new emotions all over again. Everything that your eating disorder has numbed in the past will resurface. And then you do have the ability to feel again. And that's scary.

Olivia: Yes.

Dave: Yes. Do you?

Shaista: Yes. For the longest time I couldn't feel strongly about anything, so subjects I'd feel passionate about I couldn't engage with because I'd be like, yes, I don't really have an opinion. And something that's helped me, like, with recovery is I've got my opinions back. I believe in things again, I've got opinions, I can speak again. Which, I know, sounds stupid but...

Dave: No not at all.

Olivia: No, no, no. One of my friends described it as, your personality becomes diluted.

Shaista: Yes. That's a good way of saying it.

Olivia: And that's, that's... I thought that was great. I was like, spot on. Yes, it does dilute you, I know exactly what you mean, like I was completely just, didn't care, was like, whatever, about everything. And that's one of the reasons why I changed, though. That's one of the reasons why I was like, I need myself back. I felt like, not only had I lost weight, but I'd lost who I was. I didn't know who I was anymore and I felt completely without identity as well as being like, my identity is having an eating disorder.

Lilith: And I think the thing I had to accept in stopping bingeing and purging was that, the issue was trying to restrict, because that would trigger it. If I thought it was good, I thought restricting was me getting better from bingeing and purging. So, about six months ago, I started really a concerted effort towards recovering and, with the occasional lapse, I've been mostly success... well not successful, but it's dominated much less of my life and I eat a lot more actually now.

Dave: Amazing.

Shaista: I get my primary support online; like I blog. Connecting with so many people with eating disorders and similar problems, and that's how I've really learnt to be more assertive, be more confident in myself. Seeing people from horrible states get to wonderful states, it's just so inspiring. So being part of blogging communities has been amazing for me.

Olivia: Yeah. I spent quite a lot of time online when I was trying to recover but wasn't recovering. I was still underweight and stuff like that. If you support people and say you don't have to be like that this and you are worth changing, then you get that back, and I think that is probably, you know, the majority of the support came from online. But then, you know, I have a few people in my life who have said, I've been through what you've been through, not exactly the same thing, but I can talk to you anytime, and it's lovely to have people understand exactly how you feel or a tiny bit how you feel.

Dave: Try and find stuff online. Everyone just talks about recovery really glibly, like you just wake up one Tuesday. I've never read anyone that said they're scared to give it up. I am sort of deluding myself that I am in recovery, because the truth of the matter is, I don't want to get rid of this but I want to get rid of the depression.

Shaista: Yes, I think the most important thing is when you're going through recovery is, no one tells you how absolutely dire it will be at the beginning and how every bit of your body will be like, no no no no no, and pushing through it will make your depression a million times worse. So I think when you do enter recovery, that getting support is so important. And that doesn't necessarily mean through a therapist; it means like you can get it from friends, family, online, doctors: anything that helps.