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Socializing with Mental Illness

“Never give up on someone with a mental illness. When ‘I’ is replaced with ‘we’, illness becomes wellness.” (Alder). This quote clearly demonstrates the idea that having close relationships can be fundamental for an adolescent going through life with a mental illness. Teens with mental illness often may need support or someone to look out for them because suffering alone can be dangerous. Mental Illness is a scary part of life for around 1 in 5 American teenagers a year (NAMI). This type of illness can be terrifying to struggle through alone. Without companions or someone to confide in, it can be very hard to get through life with a mental illness. When a teen finds a close friend or a supportive person to have in their life, they will have a way to let their feelings out and get help. This subject is heavily talked about in the novel, *The Weight of Zero* by Karen Fortunati. The main character, Catherine, learns how to push her illness aside and learn to create strong relationships and bonds with people who help her forget she is ill, to begin with, and on a larger scale this shows that a teen with mental illness can benefit from positive social interactions, and these interactions help to improve their mental state.

Having someone to vent to and someone that understands can help a teen become comfortable with the way they live with a mental illness. Friendships are an important part of life for any person, but especially for teens facing mental illnesses; friends are even more vital despite how hard it may be for them to obtain close relationships (“Social Isolation and Mental Illness”). Mentally ill people are the most alienated social group because of their fear of rejection

or social contact. Though they may crave attention at times, they aren't very outgoing because of the stigma surrounding mental illness and how people view people suffering from an illness ("Social Isolation and Mental Illness"). With close friends, one would feel supported when they need it the most, and they would feel wanted and more important. Kids with mental illness often feel isolated or lonely because they feel different feelings compared to average teens. Studies have shown that having an active social life can decrease the effects of depression and that social interaction is the only way to improve your mood ("The Health Benefits of Socializing"). Friends can help them distract themselves from their feelings of loneliness and help them feel happy and live life despite their emotions.

Friends can be hard to come by for a kid with something like social anxiety or an emotional or behavioral disorder. Something that can be very helpful for a teen with a mental illness is group therapy or counseling. Group therapy can be beneficial because it can help a teen feel accepted because they are involved in a group of people who understand each other's problems ("The Benefits of Group Therapy"). This kind of therapy is important because it can teach a teen that socializing isn't as scary as their minds make it out to be, and they will ultimately become more comfortable with themselves and interacting with others. In *The Weight of Zero*, Catherine Pulaski joins a therapy group. At first, she is skeptical that it will be effective because she had given up on making friends because her closest friends dropped her after she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. To her surprise, she started getting closer with the people in her therapy group and ended up becoming a lot more trusting and happy because they helped her adjust to living with the disorder. This goes to show that group therapy and confiding in others can help a teen distract themselves from their confusing emotions. It also helps them realize that others are fighting battles just like their own ("The Benefits of Group Therapy").

Group therapy is a good way for a teen to realize what they are going through is not abnormal and that they don't have to go through life with a mental illness by themselves.

Life with and without socialization are drastically different for someone diagnosed with a mental illness. Without it, one may experience a struggle with learning, focusing, or stress (“Social Isolation and Mental Illness”). Things can take a dark turn for teens if they battle with their mental illness on their own. Written in *The Weight of Zero*, Catherine is faced with dark suicidal thoughts and is seen in a very bad place of her life before she befriends a boy from her school, Michael, and gets closer with a girl in her support group, Kristal. If a teen is keeping to themselves, things are bound to get hard. Often times, they have a tendency to be very reserved and only share the bare minimum with parents or therapists. When they learn to be more open with people and share the information required to get help, they'll start to feel a lot more comfortable and begin to realize that life isn't as challenging when they have people to talk to and to help guide them.

Having a social life can be very fundamental for a teen suffering from a mental illness. It helps teens to be open or seek help when it comes to how they feel or else they are left alone, trapped in their own minds to deal with all of their problems. The obvious way to expand one's social life is through making friends. Since that can be a challenge for some, another good option would be group therapy or counseling. Socialization can improve a lot for a teen's life. It is very important that they incorporate it into their lives so they don't have to go through life with a mental illness on their own.