

THE HOT LIST

Stylish stuff we want this week



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Style | Wellbeing | Celebrity

Trends

As the young royals take on the taboo of mental health, **Abigail Butcher** reveals the route to overcoming her own demons

PRINCES Harry and William joined Lady Gaga this week to call for an end to any shame felt by those suffering mental health issues. Having endured deep depression myself, I know how right they are. Being open about the difficulties many people face can make a huge difference to their lives.

Harry revealed he had bottled up the grief of his mum dying when he was 12. Now 32, he described two years of 'chaos' in his twenties that only came to an end when he sought counselling over Princess Diana's death three years ago.

Six years ago, I wrote an article in a national newspaper about my battle with mental health. I had struggled in near complete secrecy with crippling depression for almost 20 years. A serious bout in November 2010 was exacerbated by the end of a precious relationship, the trauma of witnessing a fatal accident, severe ill health, work stress... the list is longer. It left me in bed, unable to move.

I had a good job, loving friends and family, a house and a car but still it wasn't enough to part the clouds in my sky and the gnawing emptiness threatened to consume me – which it almost did. I stayed in bed for days, unconscious thanks to sleeping

pills. Somehow I got up, went to the doctor, who signed me off work, and increased my meds (I took so many pills at that point, I rattled).

But instead of cashing in the prescription, I dragged my gaunt and sorry body on to a plane to Australia, where I spent a month undertaking sailing and diving courses, intermittently staying with friends and just looking after myself.

The sun and freedom worked wonders so I took a sabbatical and, with it, travelled the world. I had reached India by the time the article was published – the article in which I had bared my soul – and was well on my way to recovery thanks to discovering how to live my life again.

On the other side of the world, when the story came out, I ducked the storm but what messages did come through on the dodgy wi-fi were nothing but supportive. When I returned home, however, having decided to move to the coast and start life as a freelancer, others were not so friendly. Some

crossed the street to avoid me and looked awkward when I stopped them. One close family member actually said to another: 'Have you seen what Abigail has written?' She was utterly ashamed. Another (now ex) friend said: 'You should get that taken off the internet – what if someone you start



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- Faux suede leather clutch bag by Koko Couture** £22, topshop.com



Top of the world: Understanding friends and a determination to seek adventure led to a new life on the coast for Abigail



dating reads it?' and proceeded to offer me the services of her SEO expert at work. I declined.

And now here we are, in 2017, with the young princes openly discussing the difficulties they have faced. Look how far we have come.

Yes, some awful people will

respond without compassion (the vitriol on the online version of my own story still makes me sick), but it's likely people will thank them for having had the courage to speak out.

I still receive emails from strangers, thanking me for my article and for giving them the courage to follow

their heart and find happiness. These alone make it worthwhile sharing my story time and again.

I'm now a travel writer and while I still suffer black moods, none are as bad or as prolonged as that dark November morning in 2010.

I take antidepressants occasionally

and am lucky to have an incredible support network of family and friends who if I'm crying, drag me up, give me a hug and make me feel loved.

Mainly, though, I've learned to self-medicate – whether it's taking a long bath, a run with my dog or climbing a mountain so I can find the steepest

way to ski down it. Adrenaline, for me, is better than any antidepressant.

Depression doesn't disappear but you learn to cope and friends can only support you if you tell them so they can understand. And with people like the princes calling for an end to shame, this can only get easier.

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