

PODCAST: YA LITERATURE AND IT'S ROLE IN DESTIGMATISING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES: HOW CAN PUBLISHERS TACKLE MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUNG ADULT BOOKS.

TRANSCRIPT

In 2021, NHS Digital released the results of their survey [Mental Health of Children and Young Adults in England 2021](#). The survey found that in 2020, 'one in six children aged 5 – 16 years were identified as having a probable mental disorder, increasing from one in nine in 2017.' (NHS Digital, 2020)

It's 19th October 2021, my name is Rhian and this report is going to be discussing how we tackle mental health in young adult literature and why books play an important role in destigmatizing mental health issues for young people. We will also be discussing how publishers can encourage healthy conversations about mental health with young people through their marketing tactics and social media channels.

Tackling mental health in our books, particularly our YA books, can seem like a daunting task. For a long time the representations of mental health in our young adult books have been harmful and damaging. [Thirteen Reasons Why](#) by Jay Asher, and its subsequent Netflix series, has been subject to scathing reviews and controversy due to its portrayals of depression and suicide with critics claiming that it glamorises mental illness. So, how can we ensure that our books are representative of mental ill health and present these illnesses in a way that is both constructive and informative. [Radio Silence](#) by Alice Oseman and [The Shock of the Fall](#) by Nathen Filer are two such examples. Oseman's novel authentically portrays the lives of teenagers; academic pressure, friendships and relationships and the discovery of oneself. Although the novel isn't specifically focussed on mental health issues, anxiety and depression are referred to but are not the sole purpose of

the plot. By normalising mental health challenges, readers will feel that they are not alone in their struggles.

So, what can publishers actually do to promote awareness of mental health in their YA books? It's widely acknowledged that books 'that explore mental health issues can help to increase awareness, encourage dialogue, reduce stigma and develop real understanding' (BookTrust, 2019) of mental health conditions. That's from [BookTrust](#), the UK's largest reading charity. As poet [MC Angel](#), told the panel of [The Bookseller's 10th FutureBook Conference](#) in 2019, the biggest thing we can do as a publishing community is to give books about mental health 'space and let them be.' (Wood, 2019) Readers want to be able to 'pick up a book and recognise themselves in the text' (Boustead, 2021) and for people that are feeling isolated and lonely, this can be a comfort to them. Publishing these books in the first place is an important step toward normalising mental health conditions. It's known that young adults are some of the most frequent users of social media and so publishers can use this as an opportunity to not only promote their books but, share hotlines, helplines and other useful resources as supporting marketing materials for their books. Mental Health Awareness week happens each year. This could be an important time for publishers to engage with their young readers. There are lots of conversations around mental health issues during this week particularly online. Publishers can actively interact with their audiences, promoting important resources and sharing books not only published by themselves but by other publishers that are constructive in the conversations around mental health. By simply interacting with these conversations and being open to publishing books that discuss mental ill health, publishers would be taking important steps in normalising and destigmatising mental health for our young people.

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With the numbers of children and young adults getting diagnosed with mental health conditions [increasing](#), it's more important than ever that we have open and honest discussions with our young people about mental ill health. Mental health illnesses have for years, been shrouded in secrecy, with negative discourse surrounding it. So, how can the publishing industry destigmatise and encourage constructive conversations about mental health through our young adult books and begin a dialogue with our young people about their own mental health. If your struggling, please reach out. [YoungMinds](#), [Mind](#) and the [Samaritans](#) are always available to support you should you need it.

(103 WORDS)

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