



I can't believe that it was only two years ago that my son, Craig, was a good-looking, happy and sociable 16-year-old. He was a great basketball player, a valued employee at his part-time job and he had started to see some really nice friends. School was also going well.

His father and I separated when he was fourteen – we tried to hang in there for the kids but then his father started an affair and the whole thing fell apart. Around the same time, Craig became really paranoid and refused to leave the house. More and more, he spent most of the day sitting in his room with the blinds drawn; he wouldn't talk to his sister or me and seemed to just lie still for most of the day. He chain-smoked and drank a lot of beer too – the room stank of smoke. Even when his dad called, he wasn't interested in talking to him. They used to be really close.

I just didn't get it. At first I just thought it was a normal stage of adolescence. Everyone told me that the best way to deal with it was to just ignore it, it was just him being a teenager. But I knew it was more than that. It was when the behaviour became quite bizarre that I knew something serious was happening.

He would tell me about the presenter on his favourite TV show and how she would whisper special messages to him, which he became more and more paranoid about. Complete strangers, and sometimes the police, would drop him home with some story of how he was standing in the middle of the road and wouldn't move, or he was running up and down the side of the highway. I didn't even know he'd left the house half the time. Sometimes when he was talking, it just didn't make sense. His words would get all jumbled up.

Finding any help for him was really difficult. I didn't know where to start. The doctor didn't really help much – he seemed to think that if Craig just talked to someone, everything would be all right. At times, I felt like he was saying it was my fault.

We tried to book in to see a psychiatrist, but by the time the appointment came up, Craig refused to leave the house. Craig's father and I went along to learn what we could, which was little. But we did learn that we were probably dealing with psychosis, and that there was treatment, such as drugs, and services like the CAT team.

Things got worse and worse. He would threaten to kill himself if anyone tried to come into his bedroom, and at one point all the knives in the kitchen disappeared. One night we had to call the CAT team when I could hear screaming from his room. His father pushed the door in and he was just sitting on his bed with nothing on, with blood everywhere.

He was hospitalised. I felt sick to the stomach and terrified that we would lose him forever. The emotional pain was unbearable. He was just like an empty shell. He would talk to me, but it just didn't make any sense.

I felt so guilty. We were both on this horrendous journey that didn't seem to have an end. At times he would be so cruel and nasty towards me, blaming me for everything that had gone wrong. That was really hard, I just about lost it, but I kept telling myself it wasn't Craig, it was the illness that was speaking.

I had to make a conscious decision not to be afraid of him and to fight as hard as I could to make things better. I knew that Craig was afraid himself and I felt it would make things worse if he sensed that I was also afraid. I never knew him to be physically violent towards others, but he was often hostile and paranoid.

At this stage he seemed to be getting a bit better, but he was still a long way from being well. I helped him maintain a medication regime, which helped to at least make life bearable, but I had long ago left behind any dreams of Craig returning to a normal life. I found that I could never relax, waiting for the next challenge, watching to see what he was going to do.

I knew that the best thing to do, the only thing I could do, was provide an atmosphere of support, caring and unconditional love. It was such a thankless job. All this time he was unpleasant, paranoid, withdrawn and miserable. Meanwhile I was still trying to seek some other solution, talking to endless streams of professionals to try and find an answer.

In the end it was a simple change of medication that changed everything. I couldn't believe it. It just shows that persistence is worth it. Almost straight away, Craig was able to sleep better, have proper meals with us and started to engage in conversations.

Like everyone else Craig is now able to be happy some of the time, rather than never. He lives at home, and spends a lot of time on his computer. In a lot of ways, he is back to his old self. He has suffered a great deal, however, especially not having any friends left. His old friends stopped visiting a long time ago, and some of his family still ignore him or treat him differently. I still feel like a lot of the blame has fallen on me, but I know that doesn't make sense. I know that I did everything I could and in the end, no parent is perfect.



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- Feeling Blamed
- Helping them Start Over

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