

Ian...My story

Ian, 51, has had mental health issues resulting from the problems that he and his partner have had with her son.

About me

I suppose it's true to say that I'd had quite a tough few years before my stepson's issues arose. I had lost a good job; my marriage had broken up, leading to me living away from my children; and both my parents had died. But I'd met my partner, and she liked my kids and I liked hers. We'd moved in together. Life seemed to be getting better. Until the autumn of 2011.

My partner's elder son had found his parents' break-up hard. He was worried by the dark, and he was dyslexic. But when he started secondary school, to all intents and purposes he had a nervous breakdown. His patterns of behaviour included hallucinations where he would see monsters flying around the room, an inability to use his legs, could not see properly, muscular spasms and catatonic shutdown where he would refuse to talk to anyone. Frequently the only way he could cope with his late night panic attacks was if my partner took him for a late night drive. Once this had to be undertaken at 4 am.

An MRI scan revealed no neurological issues, but it took three months to see a child psychologist, and this only after an emergency call to paramedics (both ex service personnel appalled by what they saw) and a conversation with the late night Social Services crisis team. It then took another two months for an assessment. This concluded rather vaguely that he had extreme issues with dealing with stress.

All this time I was going into work. Frankly it was a nightmare. I liked my job and I liked the people around me but my head was so filled up with the need to phone up people to discuss my stepson, my partner couldn't as he was with her all day long. In addition to this I found getting to work difficult because I had so many broken nights' sleep, concentrating on the job was a great deal harder.

Where I am now

Two years of misery and inaction, interspersed with numerous meetings, were required before we were able to get my stepson into an independent school, paid for by the County Council, where I am pleased to say that he is at long last thriving. However, this has come at a huge financial cost. Between us we have five children: I have a daughter who is 13, and a son who is 12. My partner has another son who is also 13 and a daughter who is nearly eight. My partner's children live with us, whereas mine live with their mother nearly 150 miles away in South Wales. I contribute to the cost of their upbringing, but our financial predicament means that I



everyone fit
for the future

find it very hard to see them, which all three of us find upsetting and is very difficult for their mother, my ex-wife.

My partner's son still needs his mother to drive him to and from school, which precludes her being able to seek work. She is a qualified teacher with 25 years of experience, but she is now is on anti-depressants and suffering from fibromyalgia. I am also on anti-depressants, having had two prolonged periods signed off work with stress and still receive counselling.

It has taken me months of effort to cope with this. I have been lucky; the Network Rail managers I had were kind men. One in particular was probably the reason why I'm still here: he knows who he is, and I owe him a deep debt of gratitude.

If anybody has problems like this: **do** talk to your manager. **Do** talk to your GP. **Do** make contact with **Myriad**, the Carers' Network. It is not tough to pretend you can cope with things on your own if you can't. And few of us can.