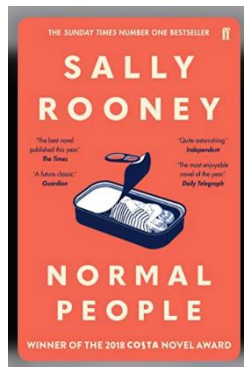


## MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK 2020



### 'Normal people'

As you are aware, it is mental health week which aims to raise awareness and highlight issues about mental health. Quite often this is done in the form of presenting factual information about mental health conditions. However another way of raising awareness is through literature or theatrical performance, this will bring an issue to life, setting it in context giving it colour and form. It is through this 'demonstration' that an issue becomes more understandable and people can relate to what they are witnessing either in part or full. They can compare and contrast this with their experience and for some it will resonate, offer insight and help them to better understand their own situations. For others it will remain simply as a book or a film, entertainment that they have enjoyed or not enjoyed.

One such example is the contemporary young writer Sally Rooney's award winning and bestselling novel 'Normal people'. This has recently been dramatized into a 12 part series and released as a boxset on BBC iPlayer (**to be viewed by individuals over the age of 16**). It tells the story of two young people Marianne and Connell and how their relationship develops at school and continues during their university years. It touches on many issues to do with adolescent life, personal relationships and friendships. What it feels like to be included or excluded by a group, liked or disliked, peer pressure to conform; and how this can affect a young person's happiness, sense of identity and self-esteem. In addition this is all set to a backdrop of complex family relationships with their subsequent effect on the young people involved demonstrating the struggle young people face during the gradual separation process away from parents and towards a more independent life.

At one point Connell loses a close friend who takes his own life. You see the subsequent effect this has on his mental health and how Marianne try's to support him. It shows how destabilising this experience is for Connell as he struggles with the subsequent anxiety and depression. However he accepts help and gradually recovers and it is this message of hope which is so important for anyone coping with mental distress.

I would recommend this book and its TV production. Both give an insight into events and experiences that can affect the social, emotional and mental health of young people. Whatever you end up feeling about the content of the story and the way it is portrayed; I am sure you will find the issues raised thought provoking. I would be really interested to hear your thoughts and if enough of you are inspired or interested by the issues raised I would be happy to convene a group where we could discuss these further. In addition as always, on an individual basis you are always welcome to contact me via the counselling service for support with any of the issues this raises for you personally.

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