

'I felt I was failing my daughter'

Reports show that an increasing number of girls are self-harming. Pip Huxster, 61, and her daughter, Jo, 28, tell us how it almost tore their family apart

Mum's story

'When my daughter, Jo, started self-harming I felt such a failure as a mother. Despite being adopted at six weeks, she had been a happy child and had always told me everything, until the age of 17, when she became withdrawn.

'At first, my husband, Bob, and I thought she was just being a typical teenager. But then one morning she showed me scratches on her arm and said she'd done them herself. I was horrified and asked her why, but she said she didn't know and begged me not to tell her dad.

'I felt trapped. I was glad she'd confided in me, but I didn't want to brush it under the carpet. In the end, I agreed to keep quiet

but only if she promised me she wouldn't do it again.

'It worried me so much that I couldn't sleep for the next two weeks. Then she came home one day with her forearm covered in blood. The cut looked so bad, I thought she'd had an accident. When I asked her what had happened, though, she pulled away from me and said she'd done it to herself.

'I felt overwhelmed with despair as it hit me how low Jo must have sunk to have hurt herself so badly. As I bandaged her arm, I started sobbing and Jo began crying, too.

'When I told Bob that night, he just kept saying he couldn't understand it. Jo had always been so positive and fun-loving.

'Gradually, we learned to accept

that Jo's depressed state of mind was an illness, and self-harm was her way of coping with it. Her GP explained that she could have inherited it from her biological parents, and nothing would have prevented the depression from taking hold.

'Jo began to see a psychiatrist regularly after that day – she'd stopped going to school – but became more withdrawn. She started going out for walks and would come back with cut arms or legs. It meant I was terrified of letting her out of my sight, so I'd go with her. We tried to hide sharp objects in the house,



Pip is grateful to have her positive and fun-loving daughter back

but she'd always find them. Her condition took over our lives.

'Jo was eventually admitted to a psychiatric hospital for treatment, where she went, on and off, for the next four years. It was devastating seeing her there, staring into space, and I felt utterly helpless as I tried to reach her. All I could do was hold her hand and hope I was helping. It was only when I got home that I'd allow myself to cry.

'At the age of 21, Jo finally reached a turning point after spending six months in hospital, when she was given new antidepressants. Gradually, she began to break the habit of self-harming, and her psychiatrist

WHY DO PEOPLE SELF-HARM?



DR FUNKE BAFFOUR, a self-harm psychologist, explains, 'People who self-harm are not seeking attention. They do so to try to release the deep emotional pain that they are experiencing, and every time they cut themselves, the sight of blood leaving their body lessens the pain that they're feeling internally.'

HOW TO HELP A SELF-HARMER

- Tell them you care about them, but don't just focus on their injuries.
- Encourage them to examine their feelings and to talk to someone.
- Don't constantly try to solve the problem. Let change happen gradually.
- For more information, contact Mind at www.mind.org.uk; 0845 766 0163.

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'Cutting myself made me forget about the pain I felt inside'

Jo no longer hides her scars, a result of four years of self-harming

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suggested she move into sheltered accommodation.

'Over the next year, Jo finally started to come out of herself. She returned to college and finally began seeing her friends again.'

'Then, in September 2005, she told me that she wanted to raise money for the mental health charity Mind. She wanted to go round the world in a three-wheeled tuk-tuk with her friend, Antonia. I finally realised she'd moved on when she set out on her journey and spent eight months travelling.'

'I'm so proud of what she's overcome. She's now studying to be a doctor. It's still hard to look back on what happened as depression is such a difficult illness to understand. But I'm just glad I've got my Jo back.'

Jo's story

'If someone offered me a magic marker that could erase my scars, I'd grab it with both hands. They look ugly and I'm ashamed of what I've done to myself, but I've accepted them as a part of me.'

'Mum asked me countless times why I hurt myself but I could never explain it, even to myself. All I knew is that I felt crushed by a dark, black cloud and that cutting myself made me forget about the pain I felt inside.'

'I hated myself for doing it, and for making my parents so upset, but I couldn't stop. All I could hear in my head was my voice telling me how useless I was.'

'The turning point came when I was 21. My medication changed, and I felt as though the darkness had been lifted. Even now I'm still on antidepressants, but I don't worry I'll self-harm again as Mum is always there to support me.'

'I used to cover up my scars, but now I no longer hide them because it's important that mental illness isn't seen as a shameful secret.'

● *Jo's written a book about her travels, **Tuk-Tuk To The Road: Two Girls, Three Wheels, 12,500 Miles** by Antonia Bolingbroke-Kent and Joanne Huxster (£8.99, *The Friday Project Ltd*). It's out in September.*

Has this story affected you?

Send an email to womans_own@ipcmedia.com