

Friday 23 August 2019

**Matt Haig calls for new language around mental health  
in a talk at the Edinburgh International Book Festival**

Best-selling author Matt Haig proposed that new language is needed to better define the difference between ‘mental health’ and ‘mental illness’. Discussing his latest book *Notes on a Nervous Planet* at a sold-out event at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the self-confessed ‘reluctant mental health ambassador’ spoke about the stigma that can be caused by incorrectly using these terms.

“I like the broadness of the term ‘mental health’ as it’s something that everyone has, but it is not the same as having a mental illness,” Haig said.

While he acknowledged the difficulty of defining mental illness using conventional language, Haig suggested that the current vocabulary surrounding mental illness is too restrictive to adequately represent its nuances.

“I felt that the word ‘depression’ never summed up what I was feeling. Depression is understood as something that is slow and anxiety as something fast - and on the outside it can look like that - but on the inside it can feel very different. So those words don’t always work to describe these things.”

Haig criticised a recent tweet by Piers Morgan suggesting that ‘mental health’ should be called ‘mental strength’ for returning the conversation to an “unhelpful binary that separates physical and mental illness.”

“I don’t understand why mental health is over here and physical health is over here - I don’t get the difference. Physical illness has mental effects and mental illness has physical effects. It’s not good for stigma to separate them like that.”

While Haig pointed to the impact of social media as a driver for increasing rates of mental illness, he also acknowledged that his use of social media is often less than healthy (a point illustrated when Haig attempted to check his Twitter feed whilst on stage).

Charlotte Square Gardens, Edinburgh

10 - 26 August 2019

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## MEDIA RELEASE

 Edinburgh  
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Book Festival

“I have a love/hate relationship with social media - I’m a bit of a hypocrite. It’s addictive - like gambling - and it can be easy to be an arsehole on Twitter.”

Haig, now 20 years on from the nervous breakdown that inspired his latest novel and 2015’s international best-seller *Reasons to Stay Alive*, pointed to the cathartic power of writing in helping him to manage his depression. “Writing was a way of channelling my energy. I don’t think I’ll ever stop writing about it [mental illness] - the more stories we hear, the more power we have.”

The event ended on a lighter note as Haig announced that filming has been completed for the screen adaption of his children’s book *A Boy Called Christmas*, which stars Jim Broadbent, Maggie Smith and Kirsten Wiig.