



People used to be afraid to talk about mental health. Today, we understand that we all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. Sometimes we have mental health problems, just as we sometimes have physical health problems. For example, do you ever feel stressed, anxious, sad, distracted, angry, confused, hopeless, or frustrated? We all feel these emotions from time to time. Some of us might, at some point in our lives, have other mental health issues. Or we might know family members and friends who are dealing with mental illness.

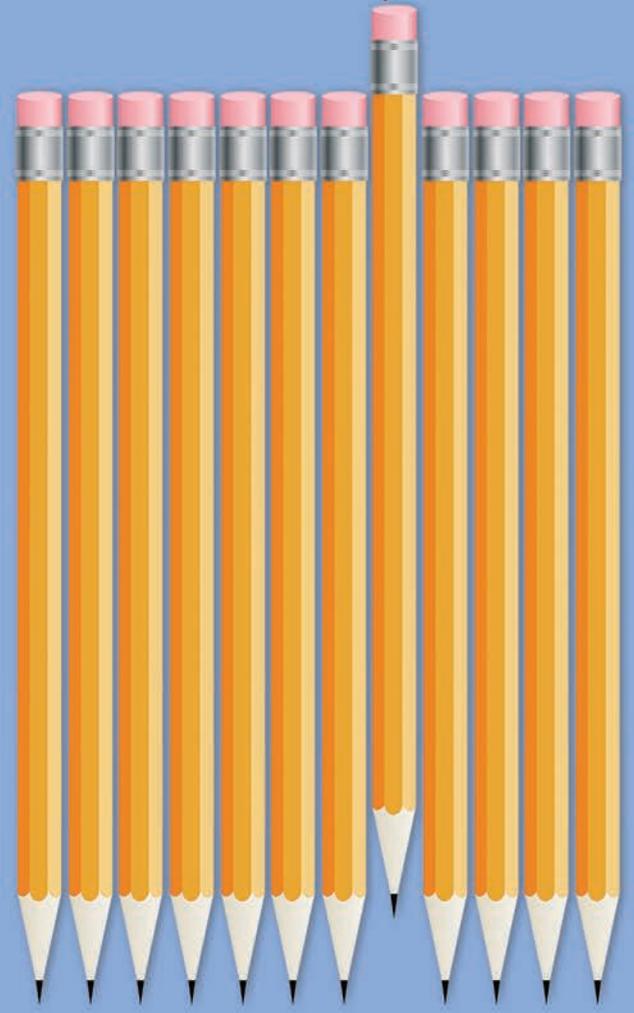
There are many ways to deal with mental health problems. Sometimes people need the help of experts. But there are lots of things we all can do. We can talk about mental health. We can recognize how mental health affects us – at school, at home, with our friends, in the community. We can learn what we can do to be mentally well. We can empathize with people who are struggling with mental illness.

That's why Pearson developed this series of books called Well Aware. Through these stories and information texts, you'll learn about how a variety of people have dealt with mental health. You'll be able to talk with your teacher and your classmates about what you read. You will be able to think about how these stories and ideas might apply in your own life.

This is an excerpt from one of the books in the series that will get you talking and thinking about mental well-being. We hope you enjoy the reading and have some great conversations. We hope you will become more Well Aware.

	<p>Canadian Mental Health Association <i>Mental health for all</i></p>	<p>PROUD SUPPORTER OF CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH WEEK MAY 4 - 10, 2015</p>
--	--	---

ALWAYS EVEN



DON AKER



Copyright © 2015 by Don Aker

All rights reserved. This publication is protected by copyright and permission should be obtained from the publisher prior to any prohibited reproduction, storage in a retrieval system, or transmission in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or likewise.

Portions of this publication may be reproduced under licence from Access Copyright, or with the express written permission of Pearson Canada Inc., or as permitted by law.

Visual Credits

Cover, title page: (pencils) Anna Tyukhmeneva/Fotolia; (hand, spring) Khvost/Fotolia

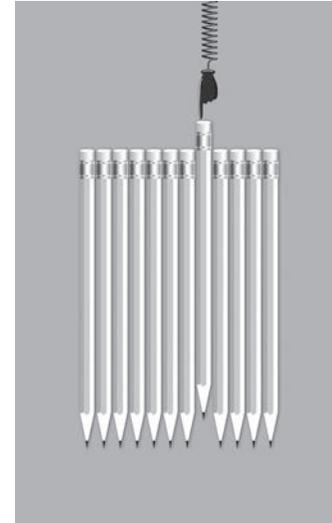
Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge copyright. Should any infringement have occurred, the publishers apologize and invite copyright owners to contact them.

For teaching ideas related to this book, see the Teacher's Resource.

1 2 3 4 5 WC 19 18 17 16 15

Printed in Canada

ALWAYS EVEN



DON AKER

PEARSON

ISBN: 978-0-13-385103-8

PEARSON

CHAPTER 3

It was near the end of July when Teri had first noticed she was more stressed than usual, noticed that little things had begun bothering her more, making her feel anxious. She'd always been something of a perfectionist, which her teachers had often commented on. It was probably one of the reasons she did so well in school. She always had her homework done, always handed in her assignments on time, never handed in a test paper before she'd looked it over carefully to make sure she'd done everything she was supposed to.

She'd been the kind of student everyone else in the class wanted to work with because she always made sure everybody in her group understood what they needed to do and how to do it. And she wasn't bossy like Ivy Willett, who liked to hand out orders to group members instead of working alongside them. Teri made the best of whatever group her teachers placed her in, but she always breathed a sigh of relief when Ivy ended up not being her partner.

But this school year hadn't been going nearly as well as the others, and it seemed like whatever was wrong had started in July.

Most of the kids she knew hated going to the mall around the end of July because of all the back-to-school sales. Everywhere you looked were signs screaming those three words. *Back. To. School.* Like punches taking the air out of summer. But as much as Teri loved summer vacation, she never dreaded school the way her classmates did. And it wasn't just because she did well. She loved learning.

In fact, for as long as Teri could remember, she'd wanted to be a teacher so she could help others learn, which could explain why she was so organized, even when she wasn't in school. Like the way she always got her clothes ready the night before, carefully laying them out in the order she would put them on. Shaniqua, on the other hand, was the polar opposite of that. After pushing the snooze button for the third or fourth time, Shaniqua would finally drag herself out of bed and haphazardly haul clothes out of drawers until she stumbled on things that matched. No matter how many times Teri had slept over at Shaniqua's house, she was always awestruck by the blizzard of blouses and other clothing items her friend threw around her room each morning.

Not that Shaniqua wasn't organized in other things. Whenever she sat down to study for a test, she always had to have all her materials for that

subject carefully laid out in front of her before she could begin. And when it came to cooking, her friend had to line up all the ingredients for a recipe before she'd even take a bowl out of the cupboard. Teri knew that everybody had rituals that were important to them at certain times. But around the end of July, ritual had started to rule her world.

At first, it was just little things—like setting the table, which was one of Teri's chores. It was a task she'd never minded doing. After all, she hated the idea of Austin touching her fork or spoon with hands that probably hadn't seen soap all day. (She couldn't even bear to think about all the germs living on his game controller.) But during that summer, setting the table had started taking her longer than usual. She found herself returning again and again to the knives and forks and spoons and moving them so their handles lined up perfectly.

One evening, Austin noticed her repeatedly adjusting them and he made a joke about Teri needing a life. She'd flushed with embarrassment, but it hadn't stopped her from doing it the next night. Or the next. For some reason, the placement of the knives and forks and spoons seemed important to her now, and she'd even started making sure the handles were all the same distance from the table's edge. She was careful not to let Austin or her father

see her do this because, in her heart, she knew it shouldn't matter if some silverware was closer to the edge than others. But something in her head told her it *did* matter. And as if to prove that point, her stomach would clench and her pulse would quicken if even a single piece was out of place.

To make matters worse, it wasn't just the silverware. In the bathroom that she and Austin used, Teri found herself needing to adjust the shower curtain so that all the hooks were the same distance apart. Austin rarely closed the curtain after he showered, and the few times he did, most of the hooks ended up bunched together, which bothered Teri for some reason. As a result, she began showering after Austin so she could leave the curtain the way it was supposed to be. The way it *needed* to be.

Then there were the pictures. Her father was an amateur photographer, so the walls in their home were covered with groups of framed images he had taken. Another of Teri's chores was dusting those frames, and in July that, too, had begun taking her longer. No matter how careful she was, she'd accidentally nudge some of the frames, which disturbed their carefully aligned edges. Standing back, Teri would see that the corner of a picture now dipped slightly lower than the others in its group,

and she'd have to adjust it again and again until she'd restored the balance that was missing.

And it wasn't just at home that she was preoccupied with order. When she'd returned to school in September, she'd found her attention drawn more and more to the whiteboards. When teachers hurriedly erased something they'd written, they sometimes left behind part of a word or the tail of a letter, and Teri's eyes would return again and again to that small black smudge, suddenly vivid against the white background. Although she knew she should pay attention to the lesson, she couldn't concentrate on it while that smudge was there. She'd find herself inventing an excuse to leave her seat so she could somehow swipe her hand across it and make it vanish. Because something told her it shouldn't be there. *Couldn't* be there.

But there was something even more compelling than silverware and shower hooks and picture frames and black marks on whiteboards. Teri now found it absolutely necessary to touch everything an even number of times. It didn't matter what her fingers came into contact with, or even if the contact was accidental—if Teri happened to brush against something, she felt compelled to touch it a second time. And if she brushed against it again, she

made sure her final contact with it was her fourth or sixth or eighth time—always an even number.

Of course, moving through the school corridor at recess or lunchtime had become increasingly stressful for her. Whenever she could, she held back until the corridors were less crowded. And if she couldn't wait for the hallway to clear, she took care to walk as close to the wall as possible to avoid brushing against people. Otherwise, she would have to turn and touch them again, which was hard to do without their knowing about it.

It was this behaviour that Shaniqua must have seen—and told Ivy Willett about.

Teri had longed to talk to someone about what had been happening to her. But each time she got close to mentioning it to her father or Shaniqua, she'd freeze, unsure what to say. She knew it didn't make sense. Who really cared if shower hooks weren't spaced evenly apart or if whiteboards weren't completely erased? Nobody, right? But, for some reason, Teri did care. And not only did she care, she'd begun to feel that something bad would happen if she didn't correct the problem.

Although Teri told herself again and again it was silly, she couldn't convince her body of that. She'd feel herself grow tense and her breathing would quicken, almost as if her body knew she was in

some kind of danger. She wouldn't be able to focus on anything else until she'd fixed whatever was bothering her. Just last week, she'd failed a math test because she'd noticed one of the six overhead lights in the classroom had blown out. Her attention was drawn to it again and again, and the time slipped away before she'd finished the questions. She'd never failed anything before in her life, and she'd been devastated when the teacher, Ms. Rudnicki, had handed back the test with the comment *Please see me about this, Teri*, written beside her score.

Meeting with Ms. Rudnicki after class that day, Teri had wanted to explain what had happened, but how could she? It made no sense. So she'd just told the teacher she hadn't been feeling well during the quiz, which was partially true. After all, the longer she'd stared at that faulty overhead light, the more her stomach had clenched, so much so that she'd felt nauseated. Ms. Rudnicki had seemed to accept her reason and even offered to let Teri write a make-up test, which Teri did. And in doing so, she'd managed to keep hidden the secret that she'd been concealing for weeks: that she was a freak.

But there was no hiding it any longer. Ivy and Shaniqua were probably telling everyone right now.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Teri's OCD causes her body to react as if it is stressed. How does your body react to stress? What are some situations that cause these reactions? How do you cope with stress?
2. Chapters 2 and 3 present events that happened before the events in Chapter 1. Why might the author have decided not to present these events in chronological order? Do you agree with his decision? Why or why not?
3. Teri's father says, "It's hard for people to interpret why others do what they do, and they don't want to offend anyone, especially somebody close to them." If you had been Teri's friend, do you think you would have spoken to her about the behaviours that Shaniqua noticed? Why or why not?
4. Teri learns that her OCD is not her fault. What effect do you think this knowledge has on her? Why?
5. Why does it take Teri so long to tell others about her problem? In what ways does she benefit from talking about it? If you had a problem similar to Teri's, how easy or difficult would you find it to tell someone? Why?