

Understanding First Episode Psychosis

You are a private psychologist specialising in relationship counselling. You have recently started seeing Tim after the breakdown of his relationship with Beth, who he had been seeing for four years since he was in Year 10 (2012). Tim is nineteen years old and the only child of Greg and Natalie. Tim has been attending at the insistence of his mother Natalie, who you had seen for 18 months following the breakdown of her nineteen year marriage to Greg, when Tim was doing VCE (2014).

You see Tim under the Better Access initiative. Natalie arranged for the family GP to refer Tim to you and she pays the gap fee you charge. You've seen Tim five times - every fortnight for the past couple of months.

Tim is a charismatic young man, of slender build, well-groomed if not a tad flamboyant, deeply intelligent, highly energetic, with a booming voice, gesticulating heavily when he speaks.

While Tim is no doubt grief struck about Beth leaving him, you sense that initially he engaged with you to please Natalie, with whom he lives and who supports him financially. Natalie works full time and long hours, and is largely absent from the home.

Natalie attended your initial session with Tim where she shared her concerns about Tim becoming more withdrawn since the breakup. In fact she and Greg were both upset by the breakup because *'they made such a great team, Tim and Beth, they were joined at the hip. They virtually grew up together; they've been through a lot those two'*.

In your first couple of sessions with Tim you glean the following: he attended a private co-ed school and while he excelled academically, he didn't obtain the marks that all expected he would in VCE. As a result he did not gain entry into the Bachelor of Law course that he, and others, had assumed he would. Instead he was accepted to a TAFE Advanced Diploma of Paralegal studies. He dropped a couple of subjects after 6 months, and dropped out completely and somewhat impulsively, after his first year.

Most of Tim's friends, including Beth, performed well in VCE and gained entry into University. Tim lost contact with many of his mates in the first year after leaving school. Now that Beth and Tim are no longer together he feels like *'.....I can be more myself now - they didn't get me at school. The teachers? So straight!! All stitched up'*.

Natalie still has a social connection with many of his friend's mothers. She has told Tim that his mates often speak about him fondly and ask after him.

Tim feels he was largely *'misunderstood at school'* but also senses that he has disappointed his parents (both are successful lawyers) as well as Beth. He plans to make it up to all of them by *'proving myself in the theatre world, on the stage'*.

Tim identifies strongly with his maternal grandmother Connie, who was an unpublished poet and to whom he credits *'my talent with words my wordsmithery'*. Connie, according to family accounts, spent the last twelve years of her life in bed following the unexpected death of her husband. She died, when Tim was thirteen years old, in unusual circumstances, mistakenly drinking some household bleach.

Tim first foray into theatre was in Year 10 at school and he maintained his involvement while at school. While at TAFE he did not pursue any theatre activity, but since leaving TAFE he has engaged with an amateur community theatre group which he sourced online. Tim spends most of his time engaged in voluntary activities supporting the theatre group including, maintaining the premises (a church manse), recruiting new members and writing his first play which he hopes the group will perform.

Tim enjoys smoking marijuana, which he first tried in Year 10, and in which he would indulge socially with his school mates. Since joining the theatre group one of the members supplies him with *'my stash.....I smoke it more regularly now because it helps my creativity'*.

In recent sessions, Tim's manner has loosened up and he seems to have let his guard down. He is keen to drive the conversation, successfully deflecting any talk about Beth, and instead is excited to share the latest in the theatre group's achievements. While he claims to be busier than usual, you note that he is no longer visiting the theatre's premises, nor is he maintaining any social or physical activity. Instead he is spending most of his time alone in his bedroom, sitting at his desk writing. He is currently working on a tragic – comedy play, the central character of which is named Beth.

Tim tells you that due to the many demands on his time he has had to permanently cancel his monthly father/son catch up over dinner at a local restaurant. It's a schedule they had maintained since Greg and Natalie separated.

In your fourth session with Tim, he attributes your observation that he has lost weight to his new health regime – he has adopted a paleo diet and no longer eats the food Natalie prepares, *'paleo is the way to gocivilised man's diet might as well be poison, a one way ticket to diabetes. Ha ha Mum would love it if I got diabetes, all part of her plan to control me.'* In addition to the weight loss he looks drawn and upon questioning explains that he has been up all night writing. In fact he shares that he enjoys *'how the darkness encourages words'* and prefers to sleep during the day and work at night.

In his fifth session with you, Tim attends in theatre costume, claiming he didn't have time to change between rehearsal and his appointment. You are disturbed by an unfamiliar intonation in Tim's voice and he seems to be holding his jaw in a strange affected way. He shares with you his suspicions that his school *'.....had a plan for me..... they didn't want my words on display, they know, I know. They set me up. They planned to fail me. They knew what they were doing. That is what I am being told and I'm telling you. Just so you know.'*