

# Mental health and post - traumatic stress

Red Snow illustrates how different people can react to a traumatic event in their lives.

Each character has their own way of coping with trauma, but their actions also have an effect on other people. The need to talk as the first starting point, is implied throughout the book.

## Paul

Paul copes with the sudden death of his wife by repressing his feelings.

He refuses to talk about the death of his wife Maggie. He knows how she died, but he is unable to face up to thinking about it, because it causes him such pain. He justifies this by telling himself that he is protecting his daughter, whom he thinks may have witnessed the car crash. He also believes he is protecting her from her uncle Joe, whom he sees as potentially a bad influence.

His repressed feelings contribute to his severe bouts of disabling depression.

## Megan

Megan's ability to deal with the death of her mother is hampered by the fact that no-one will talk about it. At the start of the story she has few facts about the car crash. All she has to remember her mother by, are a few items in a memory box, made at the suggestion of a counsellor soon after her mother died. Megan would like to talk about what happened to her mother, but she knows that her father gets upset when mentioning it, so she keeps quiet.

Paul is her only surviving parent, so if he became too ill to look after her, she would have to go into care. This is her biggest fear and prevents her from asking for help.

This situation means that Megan is not allowed to grieve and as a result she is prone to panic attacks. These are triggered whenever she is confronted with the reality of her mother's death. Finding the photograph of her mother in Irene's house was one such trigger.

However, things change when she meets Irene and realises that her father has not been wholly honest about the crash. Also for the first time, she is able to talk

about her feelings with Ryan and later with Kirsty. These things combine to spur her on to discover the truth.

## **Joe**

Joe is a complicated character who is suffering from post-traumatic stress after his experiences fighting in the army, but he is also consumed with guilt for his part in the death of his sister Maggie. Even though it wasn't his fault, he blames himself for allowing Maggie to drive the car that crashed.

His symptoms include a short temper, sleepless nights and his inability to hold down a job. These traits have given him a bad reputation in the community, even though they sympathise over his troubled past. However, we eventually discover that he cares deeply about his family and is trying hard to come to terms with his problems.

## **Irene**

Irene is still grieving for the death of her husband and finds it painful to talk about him at times. She is also uncomfortable about the fact that Paul doesn't want Megan to know the truth about the crash. Towards the end of the book, we discover that she feels guilty for her part in the crash. Like Joe, it wasn't directly her fault but she feels responsible because of the cat.

There is an indication towards the end of the book that Paul and Irene will talk to each other and may come to an uneasy truce.

## **Bill**

Like Joe and Irene, Bill is not happy that he cannot talk to Megan about her mother. He makes some attempt to change Paul's mind, but is met with resistance. He knows that Paul is not well, but feels powerless to do anything other than persuade Paul to see a doctor. Bill has a sense of relief towards the end of the book, when the truth starts to unfold. He has some sympathy for Joe's traumatic past, but he is quick to blame him for things without evidence.

## **Ryan**

Whilst Ryan has family problems, he is not directly suffering as a result of a traumatic event, but he is suffering because of his parent's divorce and his mother's absence. However, he can see that Megan is suffering due to everyone's refusal to tell her the truth about her mother's death and he tries his best to help her. His discover of the blood on the snow inadvertently started Megan on her journey to discover the truth. Without his encouragement and help, she may not have persevered and the story could have ended very differently.

## **Kirsty**

Kirsty has come to terms with what happened to her in the fire, but there is still scar tissue, both physically and mentally. She still bears the scars on her arm where she got burnt after trying to save her dog and when she is confronted with the fire in the forest, she panics as the memories come flooding back. However, despite memories that are still quite painful, Kirsty is not afraid to talk about her feelings. Running for a related charity helps others but also helps her cope. She provides a good role model for Megan and Paul and offers some good advice to both of them.

## **Feeling different – self esteem**

Some of the characters have traits or physical characteristics that make them stand out in their community. Megan has red hair and is small for her age, both of which cause her embarrassment at school. She is also embarrassed because she is over protected by her father and not allowed to have the same freedoms as other pupils in school.

When she meets Kirsty and her family, she realises that people are different in different ways, but it's what's inside that counts. We see this when she defends her new friend Rosa, who gets teased for being tall. With Kirsty's help, and some new friendships with Ryan and Rosa, we see Megan gradually become more confident and self-assured.

## **Relationships with parents**

Both Megan and Ryan have absent mothers and rely on their fathers for support. But their situations are very different.

Megan tries hard not to upset her father. She resents the fact that she has had to become his carer but fears she may be put into care if he becomes too anxious. She also resents his over protectiveness. Sadly, there is no extended family to support Megan.

Ryan is angry with his mother for moving away, but resents his father for putting his step mother first. His father's desire to build a new house for his step mother has meant that Ryan has had to move schools and has to stay at his grandad's house until part of the house is ready.

This negatively affects Ryan's relationship with his step mother. However, Ryan has a good relationship with his grandad, even though he would rather be with his father.