

A N O P E N B O O K

Frankie Bridge was first thrust into the spotlight as a member of S Club Juniors, before going on to join the hugely successful girl group, The Saturdays. But behind the scenes, things weren't easy – and for a short time in 2012, she found herself an inpatient at a mental health hospital. For Frankie, this was an opportunity to speak about the realities of mental health, and she hasn't looked back since. Here, we catch up about her new part-autobiography, part-self-help book *OPEN*, and what it means to be a 'work in progress'...

Writing | **Kathryn Wheeler**

Hi Frankie! Congratulations on your new book, *OPEN*. Does it still feel a bit surreal? It does! It's weird because people who I don't know are now getting to know me quite intimately! But it's good because when I'm saying things that I'm feeling, and seeing that others have also experienced it, it makes me feel less alone – at the same time as making *them* feel less alone. It was a difficult writing process, but I enjoyed it. And now I've got the end result, it was all worth it.

In *OPEN*, you're asking people to 'Speak out. Ask for help. And be helped.' Do you remember the first time you spoke out about your mental health? I went to the doctor, I thought I was just tired. He was the one who suggested I needed some therapy, and that was a weird moment because I just couldn't see it, it wasn't something that I knew anything about, or that anyone had spoken about.

But it was after that that I realised he was right, and I realised that things weren't quite as they should be.

In 2012 you had a short stay in a mental health hospital. Did you have any preconceptions about it before going in? In my head, it was all padded walls and being locked in your room. It wasn't like that at all, it was a really comforting place to be, and it was such a relief to be around people who I didn't have to lie to, or pretend to be OK in front of. It was just a massive weight off my shoulders, and I didn't really expect that before I went in.

You then went on to talk publicly about your stay. Was that a difficult decision? No – it was more that, at the time, the press assumed that I had some kind of addiction or eating disorder. No one really thought about anxiety

and depression, and I just wanted to raise awareness that there are different things that people go to hospital for.

How do you approach conversations about mental health now? I don't always know how to approach it with other people, because everyone's different, and I don't want to frighten people off. But if anyone asks me a question, I find it quite easy to talk about my mental health. It doesn't mean if I'm walking around and someone asks me how I am, I'll say, "Oh I'm awful." There are only certain people that I tell. But it's important that I have those people.

As a mother of two boys, do you talk about wellbeing at home? I do try to but, though I struggle with my mental health, I don't really know how to approach the subject with them at such a young



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age. I just try to ask questions about how they're feeling. When they're at school, I ask them whether people are being kind, are they happy, and just reassure them that I love them. When they're scared about things, I try not to just brush it off and push it to the side – I try to be understanding.

You call yourself a 'work in progress', what do you mean by that? I'm not going to be fixed. I have a chemical imbalance in my brain, and it's not going to go away. So every day I have to work on getting up and staying positive. I'm always learning what can press the wrong buttons, and what presses the right buttons. But I think that comes with age and surrounding myself with the right people. I'm kind of accepting that this is who I am. I have anxiety and depression, this is who I am, and it is what it is.

Do you have a message for someone who might be going through something similar?

Knowledge is key. Know what is happening to you, find someone you can confide in, and don't give yourself such a hard time. Remember, a better day is around the corner.

'OPEN' by Frankie Bridge is out now (Cassell, £18.99). You can follow Frankie on Instagram [@frankiebridge](https://www.instagram.com/frankiebridge) 