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CATHERINE, DUCHESS OF CAMBRIDGE

<https://youtu.be/AFbZYgXCSY4>

ACTION ON ADDICTION

Thank you, Ant and Dec. And thank you, Mike, and The Forward Trust for bringing us all here together this morning. I'm so pleased to be joining you to launch the "Taking Action on Addiction" campaign. And I'm grateful to those of you who have shared your experiences of addiction with me here today.

Addiction is not a choice. No one chooses to become an addict. But it can happen to any one of us. None of us are immune. It is all too rarely discussed as a serious mental health condition and seldom do we take the time to uncover and fully understand its fundamental root causes.

The journey towards addiction is often multi-layered and complex. But, by recognizing what lies beneath addiction, we can help remove the taboo and shame that sadly surrounds it.

As a society, we need to start from a position of compassion and empathy. Where we nurture those around us, understand their journey and what has come before them. We need to value and prioritize care and support, helping to restore and connect individuals who are clearly suffering to the people around them. That is why I'm so passionate about the work of The Forward Trust, an organization I'm so proud to be patron of. This is the work that you and many other charities provide day in, day out and it's needed now more than ever.

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on addiction rates and families and children are having to cope with addiction in greater numbers than ever before. We know that over one and a half million people across the UK, who did not have substance misuse prior to lockdown, may now be experiencing problems associated with increased alcohol consumption. Around 2 million individuals who were identified as being in recovery, may have experienced a relapse over the past 18 months. And almost one million young people and children are showing an increase in addictive behavior since the pandemic began.

Yet, there is hope. Over the last 10 years, I have had the privilege of meeting many incredible people who have lived through the harsh realities of addiction. Through their own hard work, and with help

from communities and charities, such as The Forward Trust, lives really are being turned around. These are stories of healing, of hope and recovery that can inspire us all.

I fully support the 'Taking Action on Addiction' campaign to improve awareness and understanding of addiction. The campaign will show us that not only do many people recover from addiction, they can go on to prosper. We can all play our part in helping this work. By understanding, by listening, by connecting. So that together we can build a happier, healthier and more nurturing society. Thank you.

EARLY YEARS

Over the last nine months, the pandemic has been a warring time for us all. We've experienced isolation, loss and uncertainty. But in the midst of this crisis, we've also seen huge acts of kindness, generosity and empathy. The pandemic has reminded us just how much we value living in a world where people care for one another and the importance of feeling connected to the people around us. And it's these connections, these relationships that are founded in the earliest years of our lives.

People often ask why I care so passionately about the early years. Many mistakenly believe that my interest stems from having children of my own. And while of course, I care hugely about their start in life, this ultimately sells the issue short. Parenthood isn't a prerequisite for understanding the importance of the early years. If we only expect people to take an interest in the early years when they have children, we are not only too late for them, we are underestimating the huge role others can play in shaping our most formative years too.

Over the last decade I, like many of you, have met people from all walks of life. I have seen that experiences such as homelessness, addiction, and poor mental health are often grounded in a difficult childhood. But I have also seen how positive protective factors in the early years can play a critical role in shaping our futures too. And I care hugely about this.

Because the science shows that the early years are more pivotal for future health and happiness than any other period in our lifetime. Because as many as 40% of our children will arrive at school with below the expected levels of development and because the social cost of late intervention has been estimated to be over 17 billion pounds a year. The early years are therefore, not simply just about how we raise our children. They are in fact about how we raise the next generation of adults. They are about the society we will become. Which is why I wanted to start a society-wide conversation to hear what people across the UK think about the early years, too.

I was humbled that over half a million people responded to the Five Big Question survey, showing just how much people want to talk about this. We combined these findings with national research and a Covid Lockdown survey and together this represents the UK's biggest ever study on the early years. These collective insights are critical and the questions they pose will help guide our work in the years to come.

Firstly, if parents are struggling to prioritize their own wellbeing, how can we better support them? Secondly, what is at the root of why parents feel so judged? Thirdly, how can we address parental loneliness, which has dramatically increased during the pandemic, particularly in the most deprived

areas. And finally, if less than a quarter of us understand the unique importance of a child's first five years, what can we do to make this better known?

We must do all we can to tackle these issues and to elevate the importance of the early years, so that together we can build a more nurturing society. Because I believe, the early years should be on par with the other great social challenges and opportunities of our time. And next year, we will announce ambitious plans to support this objective.

My final message is a thank you. Thank you to all the families and parents and carers for the important work you do every single day in raising our children. And thank you to those of you working to support these families and their children too. What you do takes hard work, commitment and vision. It is a brave thing to believe in an outcome, in a world even, that might not be fully felt for a generation or more. But what you do isn't for the quick win, it's for the big win. It's for a happier, healthier society as well as for happier, healthier children. Only by working together can we bring about lasting change for the generations to come. Because I truly believe big change starts small.

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