

Help.

Depression is like a shadow in your soul, growing when you least want it to. It's a monster of your worst thoughts, waiting for you to become vulnerable for it to attack. It's an overwhelming sadness to the point where everything feels numb. Anxiety is overthinking. It's panicking and stressing to the point of nausea. And having both is just torture.

I don't know when it started exactly. Maybe the teasing in school. Or the expectations and pressure in school. My dad's diagnosis. It feels like I've been this way forever. That I've been broken forever.

The bell awakes me from my thoughts and I slowly get up and walk through the hallways, waiting for when I could finally go home to my bed. A teacher stops me with a concerned face.

"Phoebe, are you okay?"

"Yeah. I'm fine."

More like I'm used to it. Nobody else will understand. Nobody cares. I was looking at the ground when I ran straight into someone. I looked up and saw Ellis, the one person in the world who had always been there for me. They took one look at my face and wrapped their arms around me. Soon enough, everyone left for the next period and it was just the two of us, standing in the middle of the hallway. I let Ellis hold my weight while I crumpled to the ground, sobs racking my body.

"Hey," they say, "I'm here."

I nodded and calmed down, taking comfort in their embrace.

"What happened?"

I looked up at them with a frightened expression on my face. The tiles and lockers were almost blinding. The silence was unbearable. I cleared my throat, "something happened yesterday. I didn't mean for it to but I'm really scared Ellis. I don't know what to do," I paused, "I-I can't say it. I can't."

"Why?"

I closed my eyes and breathed. "I've been having these really bad thoughts. Like really bad."

Ellis looked at me and I could tell they were trying to put everything together. "Thoughts of what? Do you mean you're thinking about killing yourself?"

Time stops. The tension was so loud. I panicked. I felt my breathing becoming quicker. Yes. Yes.

"No," I said automatically, instantly regretting it.

I stared at them, trying to convey what I actually meant to say with my eyes, hoping they would somehow read my mind.

"Glad we got that out of the way," Ellis chuckled. They put their hand on the back of my head and forced me to look at them. "Things are tough. I get it. Everyone's scared for the future and stressed out right now. I guarantee that you are not the only person feeling this way. People just don't talk about it."

"Yeah," I nodded, "We should head to class."

Ellis smiled hesitantly, "Talk later?"

"Wait!" I called before I could stop myself. Ellis turned around. They took one look at my face and understood.

“Just say it.”

“I-I can’t,” I swallowed, “Um- when I said no I meant yes.” I watched their face as they realized and came rushing back to me.

“Please don’t. Please. For me. What am I supposed to do without you?” I collapsed back into their arms, insanely grateful for Ellis, and terrified for myself.

They convinced me to go to the school counselor, and that’s where I found myself at the end of the day, pacing back and forth in front of the rainbow pillows and beanbag chairs. The place looked like it came out of a preschool. The counselor came in with a kind smile.

“Hi, I’m Ms. Sable. What’s been going on?”

I knew from the second I saw her I was gonna tell her everything. This was my last chance and she was supposed to be a professional. If she could fix me then everything would be perfect again.

So, I did. Once I started, everything just spilled out.

“Oh honey, I’m so sorry that must’ve been awful. Oh, you’re going to make me cry.”

It felt uncomfortable, to say the least. My hands were fidgeting in my lap. Was my life *really* that sad? I mean I had great friends, a family who’d do anything for me, and everything that I would ever want.

“OK, so everything that happens in this room is confidential, except if you are or are thinking about harming yourself. But that hasn’t happened yet, right?”

I just go along with it. But that’s when I realized nothing could really help me. Nobody could actually fix me. Afterward, Ms. Sable sent me a video to “help control your feelings!” It was a cartoon.

If she had bothered to listen or validate my thoughts maybe that would’ve helped. Or if she would have had some real advice, maybe I could’ve gotten better. But things just got worse.

It comes when you least expect it to. In the middle of the night when you start thinking about the future or worrying about what you did that day. All of a sudden these thoughts come and you’re terrified of what you would do to yourself if you had the chance. Then there’s nothing to do but crawl into your bed and try to force the thoughts to go away.

Although Ellis didn’t say anything, I knew that my constant sadness and fear must’ve gotten annoying. I figured out that for just one counseling session you have to pay a lot of money. I tried apps online until I found a community of people who were also struggling but were coming together.

Suddenly I had so many friends, and they all loved me no matter what. They cared and they understood. And even though I was still scared of everything, especially myself, I wasn’t alone anymore. And it felt amazing.

I realized that I’ll never fully get better. But life doesn’t work like that. It’s such a common thing to see so many teens scared and upset over things. There’s always ups and downs. Instead of spotlighting mental health, people should focus more on normalizing it. These things happen to everyone, even if it doesn’t get this bad. There will be good days and bad days, but we need to make talking about it more common. People who are suffering might feel like they are fighting a constant battle and sometimes even the small things others do can help.

Even though it is often said, the most important thing is to be kind. No matter what. You never know what the person next to you has gone through. Or how much your words might mean to them. It’s hard to keep fighting.

So help.