

When Will it Stop?

Anxiety makes it feel like the weight of the world is falling down on me. It feels like I am on fire, but there is nothing I can do to diminish the flames. It makes my heart pound out of my chest and causes my head to spin. It seems as though every negative thought I think fuels the flames of worry around me. It feels like I am being consumed by the flames as I spiral out of control. It makes me wonder: when will it stop? What if these spiraling thoughts never slow down?

I began to feel the world's weight crashing down on me in kindergarten when I didn't want to leave my parents to go to school. I worried that something bad would happen to them once they left. My parents constantly reassured me that everything would be okay and that they were safe. But I didn't believe them. There was a little voice in the back of my head that told me I had things to worry about.

Throughout grade school, this little voice was constantly interrupting my everyday life. I struggled to feel comfortable at school and at other peoples' houses. I worried that my friends didn't really like me, even through their outpouring demonstrations of kindness and love. I was constantly anxious that I was not good enough as the person I was, or in the sports I played, the hobbies I participated in, and in my academics. It got to a point where anxiety consumed every aspect of my life, like I was engulfed in the flames of worry. It seemed like there would never be a time when I wouldn't experience anxiety.

After visiting my first therapist in second grade, I learned how important it is to expect recurring worries such as being dropped off at school or going to a birthday party. If you can

anticipate the worry, you can make a plan to manage your anxiety and talk that little voice in the back of your head down. Learning about your anxiety, such as when and why it appears, as well as how it appears for you, is vital in coping with it. It is crucial to comprehend that no amount of anxiety makes any difference to anything that is going to happen or what has happened. Knowing that anxiety is just a visitor and that it can be turned away at the door through these coping mechanisms became the fire extinguisher I needed to put out the flames of my worry.

Therapy has also helped me understand that while anxiety can be the most lonely and isolating feeling, you are never alone. When I first started attending group therapy meetings, I vividly remember walking into the waiting room where two ‘perfect-looking’ girls were sitting. I thought that there was no way they had experienced the same struggles and darkness as I did. They looked ‘too cool’ and seemed too put together to be suffering from anxiety and depression. I was taken aback to see them walk with me into the same room. Hearing them talk about their own stories, self-doubts, and hardships made me realize how you NEVER know what someone else is going through. You can never judge a book by its cover. Nobody is perfect, and that is what makes us so special.

Mental illness is not a weakness. In fact, it is quite the opposite. You have survived everything you thought you wouldn’t, and that is your strength. While life may not stop or slow down when you have a mental illness, life is too short to be at war with yourself every day. It is too short to constantly feel the weight of the world on your shoulders, and to spend so long engulfed in the fire that your mental illness lights. When putting out the fire of anxious, depressive, compulsive, or obsessive thoughts, the goal isn't to get rid of every single flame, but

to get to a place where the flames are manageable, or where you may not notice them anymore. It is vital to remember that life goes in waves, and even if things don't feel like they will, it does get better. Our hardships today may not be our hardships tomorrow, next month, or five years from now. All of the toughest days come to an end. Most importantly, there is always room for change and hope for better days even when your brain tells you there isn't.