

STUDENTS STRUGGLE THROUGH ANXIETY CONDITIONS ON DAILY BASIS

The room started to close in around her. She could not move. The heaviness in her chest made it hard to breathe. Her throat tightened and she stuttered without a voice. Tears fell down her red, burning cheeks and her body trembled.

She sprinted out the door to a place where she could be alone to cry until her body refused to shed another tear. She practiced breathing exercises until she regained a regular pace. Her dizziness subsided and Jane Doe #1 exited her quiet space.

Everyone in the hallway noticed her swollen eyes and red face. Maybe she did poorly on a test, or maybe had a bad day. Maybe she should just get over it.

No one figured an unexpected presentation caused Jane #1 to have an anxiety attack in the middle of class.

"Everyday I am faced with things that trigger my anxiety such as standing by a group of people, walking into a classroom, interacting with people I do not consider friends, asking questions, getting called on, group projects, [and] asking to leave class for something," Jane #1 said. "For me, most of my anxiety attacks just sort of happen. They just come out of nowhere. However, sometimes I just wake up in the morning and I know that it's not [going to] be a good day. Sometimes I can just tell when I need to separate myself because I just know that a certain situation will set me off."

Anxiety is defined as a state of fear, apprehension, or uncertainty caused by anticipation of events, circumstances, or situations, according to the Anxiety Center. This state of anxiousness often results in anxiety attacks. General symptoms of panic attacks include heart palpitations, sweating, chest pain, nausea, and the inability to calm down. These symptoms can last from a few minutes to several hours.

"I do suffer from all of the [general symptoms], however some are worse than others. I would say I usually suffer from social anxiety the most but this usually leads to me getting panic attacks," Jane #1 said. "When I have a panic attack, I am usually on-edge for the rest of the day and sometimes a day or two after the incident. So if I really need to, I will miss school or an event so I can recover."

Jane #1 met up with Jane Doe #2 to walk to class together. As soon as they saw each other, Jane #2 knew it was not just a bad day. She immediately recognized the residual symptoms of a panic attack and knew how to calm and comfort her friend. Having also suffered from anxiety, Jane #2 understood how it felt to experience a panic attack at school.

"Anxiety is a lot like an irrational fear. There are a lot of different things that can cause anxiety to become a problem, and most of these cases are things that are simple that other people deal with regularly. Going into new situations can be very stressful for someone with anxiety," Jane #2 said. "To someone

who doesn't have it, anxiety seems like it's just an over-exaggerated grab for attention. It's hard to tell someone who doesn't have anxiety what's going on and why it's so hard for you."

WebMD acknowledged anxiety as a normal, everyday emotion. However, anxiety conditions go beyond everyday nerves and keep people from carrying on with their normal lives. WebMD categorized anxiety into three conditions: panic attacks, social anxiety, and general anxiety.

Panic attacks occur randomly and lead to chest pain and heart palpitations. Social anxiety brings overwhelming worry or self-consciousness about everyday social situations. General anxiety makes people feel excessive, unrealistic worry and tension with little or no reason. These forms of anxiety often intertwine in different situations.

"I suffer from panic attacks, social anxiety and general anxiety. Generally, my anxiety comes as one," Jane #2 said. "I can usually tell when an oncoming panic attack is happening. Sometimes I'll have a really hard time focusing. I feel really hot, like the idea of air conditioning never existed. I tend to jostle my legs more than I usually do, and my hands begin to shake. My eyes start to dilate and I have a hard time getting myself to breathe. My voice becomes a little uneven and I tend to be a little snappy or easily annoyed. I also have a hard time speaking or explaining what's happening."

Instead of suffering from regular panic attacks, other students such as Jane Doe #3 felt burdened by everyday anxiousness. School work, SATs, and uncomfortable social interactions brought general uneasiness on a daily basis.

"Normal situations usually don't cause me anxiety, but I do get really anxious sometimes when I think of school and that, as a junior, this is when my actions are really starting to affect my life," Jane #3 said. "A lot of the time, my anxiety will show up when I am really busy or I have a lot on my plate and I just kind of keep it inside because I don't want to burden others with my anxieties. I could talk to my friends or family, but I feel like I am just complaining and that I am being stupid. I like to be the one that people come to, but I feel like a burden when I go to others with my issues."

Jane #3 pushed her feelings aside, not wanting to burden friends with her problems. She decided to try getting over it. She attempted seeking help through therapy, but it wasn't enough to help her get over it. She gave up finding a solution.

"Other than occasional therapy, I do not have any other help with my anxiety. Anxiety is a hard thing to deal with on your own and it isn't always healthy to deal with it on your own either," Jane #3 said. "I am sure that holding everything in isn't really helping, but I do not know what else to do. I am just always so tired and in so much pain that my anxiety

will show up and I can't handle it all."

Jane #2 attended therapy as well, along with regular group sessions, and took daily doses of Lexapro to combat her depression and anxiety. According to WebMD, Lexapro contains escitalopram, which restores the balance of serotonin in the brain, improving energy levels and decreasing nervousness.

"I see a therapist every other week, usually twice a month. I also go to a girls group every so often to talk with other girls who also have anxiety. I do take Lexapro every morning," Jane #2 said. "My therapist has also taught me a few tricks to calm myself down, such as doing bunny breaths or breathing in for ten seconds, holding my breath for eight, and breathing out for five. It also helps to lay a cold, wet paper towel on my forehead."

Instead of attempting to get over her anxiety and push through with no help, Jane #2 took active measures to ease her symptoms. However, most people like Jane #1 did not have access to therapy and medication for help.

"I don't get help or take medication for any of my problems," Jane #1 said. "The reason

why being my parents don't want me to be taking a bunch of medication. I don't go to therapy, so I'm forced to deal with all of my problems myself. It's not easy having to handle everything by yourself. If anything, I think it makes my anxiety 10 [times] worse."

Jane #1 dealt with her anxiety on her own. No medications. No therapy. No help. No way to simply "get over it."

Their anxiety was not something they could simply get over. Their panic attacks could not be suppressed in the middle of class. The feelings of constant uneasiness got worse because no one understood how they felt. No one noticed. No one seemed to care.

"I wish others would recognize the signs and symptoms [of anxiety and panic attacks] in others more [often] and be able to help them. I really wish someone would recognize it in me and ask me if I needed help," Jane #3 said. "I spend the majority of my day listening to others problems and their anxieties and, don't get me wrong, I love helping other people and listening to them. I am not resentful that others feel comfortable enough with me to ask me advice or to vent to me about something, but it would be nice once in awhile if someone asked if I was okay." *Story by Haley Burke.*

*Sources listed on pg.275

CAN'T GET OVER IT



Design by Kishan Patel.
Illustration by Chandler Prevatt.