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Op-Ed

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I have experienced traumatic events in the past, and I never knew exactly how to deal and cope with them. At first, I was in denial, and I thought that if I kept it to myself, I was strong enough to get through it. I did not want to be viewed as weak or in need of sympathy.

However, the hurt and impacts of the events and my situation began to build up inside me. I struggle with social anxiety and have panic attacks.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, social anxiety disorder “is intense anxiety or fear of being judged, negatively evaluated, or rejected in a social or performance situation.”

Panic attacks are “sudden episodes of intense fear that triggers severe physical reactions when there is no real danger or apparent cause,” according to the Mayo Clinic website.

I used to not understand what was happening to me. It was difficult for me to eat, sleep and concentrate.

There was pressure from myself, and I started to blame myself. There was so much negativity in my life, and I was in a downward spiral. I was hard on myself; but overall, I was scared. This was something I never experienced before.

I felt like I was alone.

According to a survey done by the Pew Research Center, 70% of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 said anxiety and depression is a major problem seen among their peers.

We are not alone.

My roommates started noticing changes in my behavior, and they voiced their concerns and advised me to go to App State's Counseling Center.

The Counseling Center offers "an array of services and resources to help students move toward their life goals," according to the Counseling Center's website.

I did not want to start therapy due to the stigma that it means there is something wrong with you. I had trust issues, and I thought a therapist would just get into my head.

Eventually, I agreed to try counseling as long as one of my friends went with me for my initial consultation. The plan the Counseling Center set for me was to start individual therapy.

Some of the services the Counseling Center can provide include short-term individual therapy, group counseling, couple/family counseling, workshops, educational programming, prevention programs, emergency services and referral resources, according the website.

Of course, I had sessions with my counselor that went more smoothly than others, but over the course of six months, I began to feel more comfortable with the idea of therapy. It started to be the one thing I looked forward to in the week, as I started to notice progress.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 50% of all Americans are diagnosed with a mental health illness or disorder at some point in their lifetime.

My counselor showed me what resources were available. There are numerous organizations or medications that can help.

I had this fear of being on medications, but many people have medications for all types of reasons. I was worried that the medication would change who I was as a person. However, if there are negative effects, there are other options.

In my case, antidepressants gave me the energy to seek out support and to participate in activities.

Coping with a mental health illness is a long and difficult process, but it is important to keep going.

I work as a writing consultant at the University Writing Center; I am the new chief copy editor of *The Appalachian*; I am diving into the ideas of faith, with the help of others, and I have reached back out to all of my friends, and I value the endless support that I have received through them and the staff at Appalachian State University.

I am still in the process of turning my life around; however, I am proud to say that I am happy — happier than I have been in a long time. If I have the opportunity to assist others who have or are experiencing similar moments, that I am going to try. It is time that we stand together.

This is me telling you that it is going to be OK.