

Not As Alone As We Think

Rachel Kasper

Still Trying to Earn My GED During the Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has filled me with feelings of depression and guilt. Once again, I am facing a huge obstacle as I try to complete my education. I was so close to finally getting my GED. With GED test centers closed, I cannot take the last portion of the test: math. This is one of the main reasons I feel so depressed. To compound the problem, I feel guilty! My depression seems selfish. How can I only think about such a trivial thing as earning my GED when I hear about people dying all day?

Dealing with the Stress of Being an Essential Worker

As a food service attendant and host in a hospital, the coronavirus and death are all I have been hearing about. There is so much death in the air. Yet, I keep returning to my own selfish thoughts.

I knew I could not be the only one with these thoughts. So I did something I have never done before in my life; I reached out.

I am falling behind in class. It makes me feel as though I'll never reach my goals of going to college and becoming a forensic pathologist like I dream about. I feel alone. I miss the classroom. I miss concerts. I miss nature walks. I miss bus rides. I miss walking into work feeling at ease. Life is so tense now; we all are afraid for the patients, for ourselves, and for our families.

My family is incredibly important to me, yet I come home from work feeling like everything I touch could kill them. My brother-in-law is high risk. I am fearful I could bring the virus home, despite how many times I wash and dis-



infect. While I am terrified for those I love, I am not afraid for myself. I love my job. It is essential work. I love knowing that I play a role in patients' healing.

Learning to Reach Out to Others

There is good that can come out of this bad situation. Reflecting on my own loneliness made me consider how alone I already was pre-pandemic. My few friends, my few family members, my lack of love, and my lack of involvement in any community haunted me. These negative feelings are common in the age of social media when you

see a lot of people posting about being able to be quarantined with family, friends, partners, loved ones. It makes you feel a certain kind of loneliness.

But I knew I could not be the only one with these thoughts. So I did something I have never done before in my life; I reached out. I have always been closed off, afraid of letting others know me, and I have always feared judgement. I decided maybe it is time I try to get over this fear and to make something good come out of this pandemic for myself.

I started off with online communities where I could be myself, but also remain somewhat anonymous. I posted on Reddit, Tumblr, and Instagram: blog entries, diary entries, poems, and art pieces. It helped to show myself in this way, but I knew I needed face-to-face interaction. So I opened up to the two family members I live with, and we had heart-to-hearts about this new world. Additionally, I opened up to the other people in my life, like my teacher and my co-workers. I discovered that a lot of people have been feeling the same way. They have been experiencing loneliness, uncertainty, and full-blown anxiety. What I learned was that my feelings were not so selfish and uncommon after all.

A Lot of People Want Me to Be My Best

Since my program transitioned to virtual classes, I still felt part of a class. I even found myself speaking up more in class, and I was not so afraid to say something wrong. Learning all this has made studying not as stressful as I have given myself room to say, "It's okay if you don't know the answer. It's okay to ask for help. Your peers want to help. Your teacher wants to help. Your family wants to help. Your community wants to help.

They want to help you understand what you are struggling with. They want you to feel at ease when doing two-step equations, for example. They care and they want to see you reach your goals of getting your GED, going to college, and getting into a great program for forensic pathology. They want to see you become the best ver-



sion of yourself that you can be and achieve all that you dream."

We may not know what the future holds for us. We may not truly know when or how this pandemic will come to an end. But I think there can be one thing we can take away from this: we are not as alone as we think.

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AFTER YOU READ:

1. What are some important lessons the author has learned during the pandemic?
2. The author worries that it is selfish to want to earn her GED when she hears "about people dying all day." How would you respond to her concern?
3. Has it been hard for you to keep up with your education during the pandemic? If so, how? And how have you addressed those challenges?
4. Think of the people in your life who want you to be your best. How do they support you?