

Having Anxiety Does Not Mean I'm Weak

Samantha Mohn

BEFORE YOU READ: Reflect on the title. Did you grow up with the message that mental health challenges were a sign of weakness? Describe the messages you got (and perhaps still get) about mental health.

Depression Sets In

I have fought anxiety for most of my life. When I was 12, I was diagnosed with depression and social anxiety. I skipped school a lot. I would feel sick to my stomach on the bus ride. I worried about what others thought of me, especially

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my looks. I did have a good group of friends, but I didn't have name-brand clothes and I didn't dress in the latest style. None of the boys would ask me on dates or even look at me. I felt I wasn't good enough for anyone. That's when my depression set in. I wanted to end my own life. I thought no one would miss me or even notice I was gone. I lost all of the good friends I had, and I was completely alone.

I spent eight days in a mental health facility to get the help I needed. What helped me get over the suicidal thoughts was remembering the look on my younger brother's face as he tried to take the knife out of my hand while I was attempting to slit my wrist. When I came home from the hospital, I was on so many different medications that I didn't feel like myself at all for about two years. I hated feeling that way, so at the age of 15, I stopped taking everything.

I was okay for the first few months of high school. I wasn't on medication and I had some

great friends. Unfortunately, I lost someone who was very special to me, and the old feelings

of depression and social anxiety returned. I tried to fight them, but they won, and I dropped out of school. Once again, I thought I wasn't good enough for anyone or smart enough to stay in school.

Becoming a Mom = Brief Reprieve

At 17, I became a mom to a handsome boy, Christopher. I had a little person who needed all of my time and attention, so I didn't have time to be depressed or deal with anxiety. At 19, I had my second child, Abigail. I raised these two little ones on my own until 2009, when I met the love of my life, Jesse. Then in 2011, we welcomed our last baby Madison to the family. I still didn't have time to deal with mental health issues.

I am now 34 years old, and I had been feeling okay until last year. One morning after dropping my kids off at school and my husband off at work, I was driving home, jamming to a song on the radio, when all of a sudden I felt like my eyes were rolling into the back of my head. I thought I was going to faint. I pulled over and tried to make the feeling go away. I managed to get myself home to wait for Jesse to come and take me to my doctor.

The doctors ran some cardiac and neurological tests to rule out a seizure or heart attack. While waiting for the results, I realized I had probably experienced a panic attack. My doctor offered medication, which I didn't want to take due to my experiences as a teen. However, I decided



to give medication another try, and for the last year I have been on a medication that has helped me with my anxiety. I feel fine for the most part, although I still have some challenging days.

Supporting My Daughter

Recently, my 14-year-old daughter, told me about the feelings she was having: not feeling good enough, not fitting in with her peers, feeling sick to her stomach when in crowds, and feeling insecure about her body. I tried to talk to her to make her feel better, but nothing was working, so I called her doctor. Initially, I didn't want her on medication, but eventually we decided to try her on the same treatment I am on. She has been taking it for a few months and has been feeling much improved.

Mental illness can happen to anyone. My advice to anyone struggling is to reach out for help. Reach out to a friend, a doctor, a local support group, or maybe all of the above. My advice to other parents is:

- Listen to your children when they express how they feel.
- Don't ignore them or brush them off when they come to you with problems.
- Spend some one-on-one time with them; do something they like to do.
- Don't be afraid to reach out for professional help for your child if you are feeling overwhelmed and not sure what else to do to help them.

Talk to Kids about Self-Worth and Shoes!

Also, it might help to talk with your kids about where their feelings come from. Talk with them about how magazines, TV shows, and social media promote the idea that people should look a certain way. These images just make people feel bad and alone and ashamed of their body. You hear kids brag about spending \$200 on shoes. Well, who benefits from that? Not the kids. They just have expensive shoes that maybe give them a momentary feeling of self-esteem. Not the parents

of those kids. Now they don't have enough to pay the light bill. The shoe companies benefit. They make a lot of money, and the kids are left feeling like their self-worth is based on what shoes they have.

There is a lot we need to do to improve our mental health – including talking about it! One thing that gave me the courage to speak out about mental health was Justin Spencer's podcast, <https://chaosandkindness.com/podcast/>. He made me feel like I'm not a weak person, and it's okay to talk about mental health problems. With this article, I hope to pay it forward and give other people the courage to get help. It feels good to help people.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What experiences do Samantha and her daughter have in common as teens?
2. What are the different strategies Samantha uses for herself and for her daughter?
3. Read the text in the yellow box. How could you help children think critically about the pressures they are under to buy things?

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Investigate the Pressures?

Yes! When children (or any of us) have the chance to think critically about the pressure to buy, we are less likely to feel bad about ourselves. We realize that the problem is not us. The problem is that companies need to sell more stuff so they can make more profit. As Samantha suggests in the article, ask your kids, "Who benefits?"

Source: <https://uk.buymeonce.com/blogs/articles-tips/9-ways-protect-kids-consumerism-why-important>