Self-Mangement

Not Looking for Pity

Andrew Fernandes

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Look up the word *hyperhidrosis*. Learn what it means and how to pronounce it. Think about the two parts of the word: *hyper* and *hidrosis*. Both terms come from the Greek language. What do those words mean? Think about English words you know that are connected to these terms.

2. Look at the image and caption on the right. Why would a person not be "looking for pity"?

What does pity mean? See the chart on the next page. Discuss. Image from: pixy.org

Facing Challenges

Going to school, I faced several challenges. At first, I didn't fit in. I went to a middle school made up predominantly of African Americans. I faced a lot of criticism because of my looks and color. Eventually, though, I learned that my background didn't matter. I found ways to fit in. I became more popular and made many friends regardless of my color. I finally felt welcome.

The hands of someone who has hyperhidrosis. Photo from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperhidrosis#/media/File:Hyperhidrosis_Treatment.jpg

Sweating: Whether Hot or Cold

As I grew older, I became more aware of something that was wrong with my body. I noticed that I sweat more than seemed normal. It turns out, I was born with *hyperhidrosis*, a syndrome which causes your sweat glands to be overactive. This condition makes you sweat whether you feel hot or cold. It makes everyday life very uncomfortable! I first noticed it in my hands. If someone wanted to high-five me or shake my hand, they would tell me how sweaty and slimy my hands were. Then I noticed it in other places on my body. There were enormous sweat stains in my armpits and back.

Dealing: Whether Fair or Not

Finally, I realized that I was different from everybody else. I couldn't leave my hands on my own desk for fear of leaving sweat stains on the table and people seeing it. I would write carefully in order to not touch the white paper with my sweaty hands. I feared people greeting me or saying goodbye with a high-five or a handshake. I changed how I dressed. I was unable to wear T-shirts because people would see my sweat stains, so I would wear hoodies just to hide them.

WORLD EDUCATION

I lived with this every minute. From the second I got out of the shower, I had to put socks on because my feet would start sweating before they even had time to dry. I was not normal, and every day from beginning to end, whether it was fair or not, I had to deal with these things.

Every morning when I wake up, it is the first thing on my mind. I am in a constant state of discomfort. I am always focused on how sweaty I am. Why is it like this? How can I make it stop? And what if someone touches me? It is so hard to explain how much this syndrome alters my state of mind. I hope you can understand how much this affects my everyday life, from when I wake up, to when I eat, to when I'm in love. Even when I am asleep it affects me. Yet I never told anybody. I'm not looking for pity or sympathy.

Being Resilient

As a young person, I understood that my life would simply be different. I still went to school every day regardless of how uncomfortable I was and how different my experience was from everyone else's. I would sit there and think sometimes how different my life would be if I never had been born with this syndrome. But I am happy because having this syndrome has built resilience and character that I couldn't have found anywhere else.

AFTER YOU READ: What strategies does Andrew use to manage his condition? What skills has he gained from having this condition and how might those skills be "transferable"—that is, useful in another situation.

Andrew Fernandes is enrolled in Wallingford Adult Education in Wallingford, CT. He is currently finishing up credits for his high school diploma. He lives with his three brothers and one sister. In his spare time, he plays basketball and enjoys video games.

Think about These Words
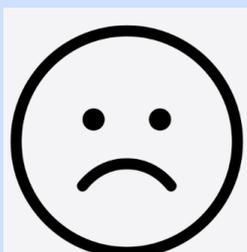
Pity

Compassion

Solidarity

What do they mean? How do they compare to each other? What is your experience with these concepts?