

## **The Devil Works Hard But My Anxiety Works Harder**

When I reflect on my past and compare it to now it seems as though it is nearly impossible to not know someone who is struggling socially. Most people would assume that the girl who refuses to make eye contact or that the boy who barely speaks is just being rude, but in most cases, that simply just isn't true. More and more teenagers and young adults these days deal with horrendous social anxiety that is often overlooked by others. According to the Mayo Clinic, anxiety is best defined as a chronic mental health condition in which social interaction causes anxiety. Most people think that it is an easily overcome obstacle, but those college students dealing with social anxiety, it is an everyday struggle that haunts them. From personal experience from dealing with social anxiety, the feeling is nothing pleasant (although the effects differ between people), the tightness in your chest, the inability to speak, and the overwhelming fear to speak out are so mentally crushing. Although I am only entering my college freshman year in 2020, I know that the stress of life only piles on if you truly care about your studies. As an 18 year old who has always struggled socially, I am more than terrified to enter life as a college student. Extroverted people might take the college experience as a means to go party and meet others, but for those who deal with social anxiety, it can be immensely hard to move into that type of lifestyle. It isn't that people with social anxiety don't want to be social, it is that they mentally cannot bring themselves to be, and in a college setting this is more than just an obstacle. In college there will be sermons and speeches a student must conduct, club activities that require some social skills, and even research projects that require students to go out into the real world and talk to real world professionals; for a student with social anxiety this can be their worst

nightmare at times. I know I am not alone when it comes to absolutely panicking in those types of situations. Anxiety keeps students from confidently performing their studies that require any form of interaction, thus leading to a drop in the students grades and mental health. If students with social anxiety aren't helped or aided then their environment could potentially be their killer; the mental strain of the social pressure leading them into depressions and either dropping out or harming themselves. This is why it's so important for students to be educated about ways to cope with their social anxiety; these students need their feelings to be validated so they can learn they really aren't alone in this. Of course, many people have different ways to deal with their social anxiety, but I have a few personal methods that work best for me! The number one thing that helps me with that tightness in my chest is lighting big scented candles and doing yoga! If the person does the poses correctly, it helps release the nervousness through the breathing exercises that go along with the yoga; people usually don't know it but we are all constantly doing yoga poses, even just laying down a certain way can help relax a person and release that pressure.

When it comes to the candles I usually light lavender scented candles or candles that remind me of home, by doing that it sort of helps trick my brain into thinking I'm in a familiar setting where I don't have to worry about large social situations. Another method that I find to be most helpful is one that more college students should have access to: petting animals. I have multiple cuddly cats that can usually sense when I'm having an anxiety attack or am highly stressed; if they know this, they will cuddle up to me and offer me their silent support. Being with animals helps us release hormones that lessen our stress, this is why I think that more colleges should have on site therapy animals that are available to students who need that comfort. A method that I personally cannot bring myself to do but one that helps my dad a lot with his own social anxiety is exercise.

I personally love rollerblading and ice skating as a means of exerting my Anxieties physically, but everyone knows that getting out and exercising isn't always an option for a college student. The people in my life who have the worst social anxiety usually tend to thrive in online situations, so I think colleges should have online chat rooms for different interests or major groups for people to connect on; by doing this, people will still have a means of social interaction without the same pressure of face to face conversations. Another thing that college students can do to at least potentially help ease their nervousness would be some job experience; although some students get their first jobs in high school but most college students are also getting their first jobs! As scary as it sounds for someone with social anxiety to get a job where they are essentially forced to speak to complete strangers on the daily, being in an environment that forces you to be social eventually helps trick your brain into being less anxious in social situations because you get more used to it! I used to not even be able to answer or make a phone call but now working at a restaurant for almost a year I find myself feeling much more at ease than I ever have in the past. Overall, although most of the time social anxiety will always be with a person throughout their life there are always things a college student can do to make things easier in life, and as young adults it's all we can really do in this crazy world to help make things a little less harder to deal with.

**Grace Anderson**