Alice,

I think I just had my breaking point. I don't know how much more stress I can take. I tried to check out stress-reduction workshops, but the next one is next semester. I don't really want to see a psychiatrist. I don't know what to do. Basically, I think a lot of my stress is because it is just so difficult for me to focus or concentrate on anything. My thoughts are running everywhere. I try, I really do. I even moved into a single for it. I feel so incompetent. I don't give a damn about making friends. I'm always feeling lonely. And worst of all, there is always something that makes me so worried, panicked, to the point of just wanting to die to relieve me of it. I have chest pains when I sleep sometimes. When I stand up to do something, I always forget what to do... always. This letter that I'm writing has taken me an hour to write because I have to pause so many times to think about my classes. Whenever I do anything away from my desk during my designated "study time," I feel so guilty. Last weekend, I couldn't eat because I didn't want to leave my room to go to the kitchen to eat anything. Yet I am always behind in my schoolwork. Since transferring here this semester, I have never felt confident, relaxed, or satisfied about anything. Everything annoys me. I annoy me. This letter probably sounds really unorganized, but I can't organize my thoughts. I went to see a Broadway play and loved it, but just really hated myself for seeing it when there was so much work I had to do. When I would read my texts, I would try to read faster so I could get all of it done, and a lot of times, just out of nowhere I would get so upset and start crying over my book and myself and my life. I've decided I don't want to live like this anymore. I'm tired of not being able to breathe and get chest pains when I get stressed. Please help me.

? Feelingsuffocatedandconfused

Answer

Dear Feelingsuffocatedandconfused,

Based on the concerns you've expressed, it may be a good idea to talk with someone about what's happening in your life and about how you are feeling. Reaching out for help, as you have done by writing to this website, is a sign of strength. You deserve credit for saying that you no longer want to experience the kind of anxiety you describe in your letter. You definitely don't have to feel the way you do any longer.

You say you don't want to see a counselor, perhaps another option is to see either your primary care provider or the health care provider at your school's health service. Since you
have physical symptoms, that's an appropriate place to start. S/he can talk with you and ask questions to better understand what you are experiencing. Based on the information gathered, s/he will make recommendations, including, perhaps, seeing a mental health counselor or therapist, and the option of taking short- or long-term medication. You can also discuss any concerns about seeing a counselor or about taking medication with your health care provider.

Talking with a counselor doesn't mean that anything is "wrong" with you. It is a way to get support and assistance in reducing your stress, minimizing your physical symptoms, and changing the way you see and talk with yourself. A counselor or therapist has training and experience in working with others who have similar feelings or symptoms.

If you choose to see a counselor or therapist at the suggestion of your medical provider, you can ask for a one-session consultation, a "sneak preview," or a "test drive" with her/him to determine if that person is someone you can learn from. It's essential to feel reasonably comfortable and safe with whomever you choose to work with. If, after the initial meeting, you don't feel fairly comfortable or safe, or believe that you are in incompetent hands, you can ask your health care provider for the name of another person to see.

Whatever you do, don't place getting help for yourself on the back burner. A medical exam, therapy, or medication are recommendations to help you take better care of yourself. And based on what you've described, reaching out for help sooner, rather than later, could get you the relief you are wanting.

Alice!
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