Dear Alice,

I'm supposed to be graduating this spring and I am totally freaking out. This summer, I formulated a plan for what I want to do when I graduate (e.g., job, grad school, etc.) but now I don't know what I want to do. I feel like my life is moving too fast. I don't want to grow up! Is it normal to feel this nervous? I almost feel like I might just die because I can't picture the future at all.

Thanks,
Scared Senior

Answer

Dear Scared Senior,

First things first, take a deep breath. The scared feeling that you're experiencing about graduating from college is completely normal. Lots of college seniors share some or all of the feelings you describe. Any time a drastic change occurs in life, a certain amount of anxiety is likely to accompany it (ever heard the old adage, "no one ever said that change is easy??). The good news is that there are resources available to help you work through your fear and/or build off the plan you formulated over the summer (or even start from scratch). It's also okay to take some time to celebrate this exciting time and not have all of your future plans set in stone just yet.

A great resource for you to utilize is the career counseling center at your respective college or university. The staff there is specially trained to help you figure out options concerning different courses of action after you graduate. Discussions will most likely include the best job or graduate school for you and whether or not it would benefit you to work for a while first before heading to grad school. These counselors will not tell you what to do but they can be a great help when you let them in on your desires and fears about life outside of the confines of being an undergraduate.

Just keep in mind that your fear is not about the act of graduating itself, it's is based on your perception about what you're supposed to do? after you walk across that stage and receive your diploma. You've got plenty of time to have some sort of idea about what you want to do after college. Heck, you have the rest of your life to determine your career destination. It's also entirely possible to start on one career or job trajectory after college and switch to another later on to suite your personal and/or professional needs at that time. There's really
no "wrong" or "right" plan after you graduate? the key may be to allow yourself to set a goal of gaining general life and work experience. There is nothing wrong with exploring your options during this tumultuous time of transition.

If you don't find career counseling helpful and that your anxiety and fear are becoming increasingly unbearable, talking to a counselor at your university or in your community may also be a beneficial step for you to take. During this time next year, hopefully you'll look back and laugh because you'll be surprised by how exciting and cool it is to be on your own, doing the "grown up" thing [2]. But first things first, you only live your final year of college once. Do yourself a favor, go out and enjoy yourself. Have a last hurrah with your friends, undergrad style!

Alice!
Category:
Emotional Health [3]
Stress & Anxiety [4]

Related questions

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Resources

Center for Career Education (Morningside) [11]
Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [12]
Mental Health Service (CUMC) [13]
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