

Good afternoon, everyone. Today, I want to share a story that captures a struggle faced by many yet often discussed by few. It's the story of a young Japanese girl of about 15 years as she battled with depression on her journey to rebuilding her identity and self-confidence.

Like many teenagers, this girl faced a cacophony of pressures—academic performance, social expectations, and the ever-present chaos of adolescence. This seemingly endless noise became so overwhelming that it triggered a severe depression. This girl felt isolated, her self-esteem plummeted, and she saw no light at the end of the tunnel. For her, life became a series of monotonous, gloomy days, each one indistinguishable from the last.

Depression, a clinical condition, has been this girl's silent companion through a maze of challenges. Contrary to popular belief, depression is not merely a state of mind; it is a medical illness with both psychological and physical implications. It skews your feelings, alters your thought process, and even impacts your actions. The stereotype that depression is "just in your head" undermines its seriousness and makes it even harder for those living with it to be open about their struggles.

Despite this, the girl took a brave step. Still too afraid to talk to her friends, she joined an online support forum dedicated to mental health. The platform made it so easy. She didn't need to show her face; people were willing to share stories like her own, and a professional counselor guided everything, keeping people safe and supported.

Gradually, through in-person talks and online chats, the girl began to see that she was not alone in her suffering. She discovered that many people, some even in her own circle, had faced or were facing similar challenges. Each conversation became a thread in a safety net woven through shared struggles and advice. One of her close friends, we'll call her Hana, introduced her to mindfulness techniques. They practiced breathing exercises and meditation, sitting in parks on weekends, taking a step back from the chaos of life to breathe and just "be." She started learning to identify her negative thought patterns and started challenging them, helping her to break out of damaging cycles.

However, it wasn't just about receiving support; the girl found strength in offering help, too. She started sharing her own experiences and coping methods in the forums she visited. This act of helping others provided a renewed sense of purpose and started to lift the fog of her depression.

There was a turning point. During a heart-to-heart conversation with Hana, the girl broke down and expressed how she felt worthless. Hana looked her straight in the eye and said, "You may not see it now, but you are stronger than your struggles. They are a part of you, but they are not all of you." This simple affirmation struck a chord. It was a moment of clarity, of understanding that her depression didn't define her value.

The girl's journey is far from over, but I have reclaimed my narrative. Although I still have bad days, they are outweighed by the good ones. My friends, both in the real world and online, helped me understand my situation better. These relationships have become my pillars, helping me transform from a girl shackled by my mental state to one who sees the light at the end of the tunnel, growing brighter and brighter as I continue my fight.

To anyone facing a similar struggle, know that help is out there—you just have to reach for it.

Conversations can change lives; sometimes, they can even save them. Thank you for listening.

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Living with Depression