iBalance

Feeling Free to Freak Out

Why Sometimes It’s OK to press the Panic Button

College can be lonely, stressful, frustrating, and sometimes even boring. So why don’t you see more people sobbing down by the Kinii? Because as humans we have been taught to act like everything is OK…I don’t have a problem, do you have a problem? Nope, everything is just peachy. Some of us have a hard time even opening up to our closest friends and family. We don’t want to ‘burden’ people with our problems; we don’t want to seem like a drama queen or a wimp. So we stuff it down and put a smile on our face, so all of the other miserable people can believe that we are happy too. Just like stuffing a sock in a tailpipe, eventually all hell is going to break loose and we explode. When we explode inward, it can lead to depression. When the explosion is outward, it frequently takes the form of anxiety and panic attacks. Either way, you feel as though you have lost all of the control that you used to cling to so desperately. So how do you clean up the mess? Start by reminding yourself that you are not alone, no matter how many people are laughing hysterically outside your room—everyone experiences pain.

How to Deal:
Your Mental First Aid Kit

Let it out: Cry like there’s no tomorrow, throw a tantrum, write in your journal. Do something. We are psychologically wired to kick it in gear when disaster strikes. Instead of trying to fight biology, give into it. Do whatever has worked in the past to blow off steam—as long as it doesn’t hurt you or innocent bystanders.

Sometimes experiencing pain makes you feel like you are a helpless child-do the things that used to comfort you when you were little-buy some crayons and coloring books, play on the swing set, watch cartoons, pretend like you’re grounded and clean and organize your room. Keep a journal, play music that relaxes you, find someone you trust and start opening up. We assume that others don’t want to listen to our problems, but in reality people like feeling needed-when someone trusts you enough to share their problems, it feels good. So let your friends and family in, they will feel more comfortable talking to you when they need a shoulder to cry on. Sometimes it’s easier talking to someone outside of your inner circle, someone who isn’t afraid to be honest with you. UWRF Counseling Services have counselors who are trained to help—it’s free, it’s convenient, and they won’t expect you to listen to their problems in return.

Mood Altering Thoughts

Avoid making your decisions based on fear

When we make our decisions based on what we want to avoid (public embarrassment, failure) the best case scenario is nothing happens, we may have lost nothing, but we haven’t gained anything either. When we make our decisions based on what we want (happiness, fulfillment)—the best case scenario is we get what we want (yay!). When we are in pain, we tend to be more fearful and cautious—which can be good in certain situations (crossing a busy intersection for example). But when we live our lives based on avoiding our fears, whether its staying in a bad relationship out of fear of being alone, continuing in a major that you hate because you are scared to disappoint your parents, or not asking someone out because you are too afraid of rejection, these are all examples of how we let fear keep us from what makes us happy.

Leaving Your Comfort Zone

Finding out what makes you happy can be a dirty job, it involves trying new things, talking to different people, and leaving your comfort zone. Most of us don’t leave this nice, warm, secure place until we are forced out, usually by some extraordinary or traumatic experience. During these times when the rug gets pulled out from under us, we have a choice—we can go back to doing what we have always done, waiting for things to get back to ‘normal; or we can choose to leap into the unknown and consider new possibilities. It’s OK to be scared and insecure, start by taking baby steps-as a warm-up create a list of experiences you have considered but never tried. Your list might include places to travel, books to read, music to listen to, and people to meet. After that, you will be more likely to take a bigger leap and explore possibilities you have never considered before.

(Adapted from “Thriving on Insecurity”, by Gail Blanke, Real Simple Magazine, October 2006)

Define Your Defining Moments

Take a few minutes to think about some of the pivotal moments in your life, the times when you found something in yourself you didn’t know you had (or forgot about) and pulled it out to save the day. A defining moment is when you said, “Yes, I will,” or “No, I won’t.” It’s when you draw a line, or erased on. It’s a moment after which you never see yourself in the same way again. Think about the moments where you took a risk and came out of it filled with freedom and purpose. Maybe it was a time when you said you wouldn’t get into the car with your drunk friend behind the wheel, or when you stood up for the person everyone else was laughing at in grade school, the time when you won the game or finished the race when you never thought you could. Acknowledge your own acts of courage, share them with others, and encourage them to do the same. Review your list of defining moments whenever you come up against a tough challenge or a new opportunity, they will remind you that you already have everything you need to get you through and move you forward.

(Adapted from “Your Defining Moments”, by Gail Blanke, Real Simple Magazine, July 2007)