

Social Anxiety and Belonging in a New School

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Arrival, Observation, and Anxiety in a New School

As I stepped into the corridor of my new school, I saw everyone stare at me with a strange and curious look in their eyes, as if they had many questions. I clenched the straps of my backpack and tried to force a smile on my face that was drenched with fear, thinking about how awkward I was and how I was never going to make any friends. I finally reached my first class, and the torture had come to an end; little did I know that more man-eating stares were awaiting me in my class. I entered the class and exchanged eye contact with everyone in the room, including a group of three young boys exchanging high-fives and giggling, a girl busy texting on her phone and chewing her bubble gum, two girls staring at me and whispering to each other laughing and two class-mates completing their homework.

I was afraid, and my anxiety level had reached new heights. I didn't know anyone, and I was too afraid to be judged for my personality. In our first class of history, which was my favorite subject, the teacher asked me a question from the course. All of a sudden, everyone looked at me, and the whole class maintained a pin-drop silence. Even though I knew the answer to the teacher's query, I made a false statement so I wouldn't appear like a nerd to the new people. However, I made a fool of myself, and the whole class laughed at my silly and pretentious behavior. I thought to myself if there was any way I could go back in time and try to present myself as witty and friendly.

But, there is always another day, and the first impression is never the last impression so the next day I went to my class slowly reaching to the doorknob and keeping a warm smile on my face. (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2013) On my second day, everyone was different; they smiled back at me, and I felt like I was welcomed into their community. I acted like myself and was confident and active in class. I noticed one of my male classmates staring at me; I adjusted my hair and fixed my posture. I was nervous but felt good about the day, so I approached him and said, "Hi, my name is Bridget." He shook my hand and introduced himself and the rest of the class. I thought to myself; it wasn't so hard to make friends after all. Everyone else was like me: awkward, nervous, and silly teenagers trying to relate to conformity.

Bullying, Isolation, and the Social Difficulties of

High School

Nevertheless, high school is never so welcoming and cheerful, particularly when you come as a stranger. It comes with bullying, shaming, hate, depression, anxiety and feeling terrible about yourself. I didn't get along with the other girls because, unlike them, I didn't watch Gossip Girls or Vampire Diaries. I was a geek who was a fan of comic books, Marvel Studios, and Batman. On the second day of school, I left my classroom, glad about my interaction with my classmates, but as soon as I made the walk of shame, I could hear students laughing and giving me strange looks. I wondered what was wrong until one kid approached me and showed the sticker on my back that read "pretentious nerd." My face went red hot, and I was too embarrassed to face anyone.

I rushed to the washroom and cried as I stood alone there, without the knowledge of someone's presence in one of the stalls. It wasn't the sticker that had me break down but the discouragement from everyone and my social anxiety that was striking to its peaks. This is where I first met Kim. She offered me a paper towel and tried to comfort me with a pat on my back and stroking my shoulder. "Are you new here?" she asked me.

"Yes, this is my second day. I am Bridget, and I recently shifted from Maine."

Welcome, Belonging, and the Beginning of Emotional Recovery

"Well, Bridget. (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) Welcome to our school, and I am sorry that you weren't treated right in your first week. High school is never pleasant, especially if you're new and different from everyone else. It is okay to be the way you are, and I am sure you're amazing. Don't try to please anyone here. You can't control the way others feel about you, but you have power over your feelings. So learn to respect yourself and love who you are and watch how everyone else learns to do so, too".

Kim was a year senior to me, but she sounded like she had more knowledge than my grandmother. I fell in love with her personality from that day and always kept her words in my mind. That day, I walked out of the washroom with boosted confidence and believed in myself. I placed the sticker on my t-shirt's front and crossed out the word "pretentious," openly claiming that I was a nerd. Everyone in the hallway was shocked to see me accept the way I was and flaunt it in their faces.

Today, I have made several friends including Kim, and I have learned to accept the way I am and love how I am different than the others. Unlike my first and second days, I have spent every single day at my new school joyfully and tried to be a better person.

References

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