

My Story...

Middle School can be really tough. Not only do we need to get up ridiculously early to catch the bus, but once we're there we need to run around from class to class trying to get to each one on time, only to get there to realize that we forgot to do one part of the homework. Then there's gym class which is not about physical fitness but it's about stressing out about changing in the locker room and having girls check you out, then being self-conscious about how you look in your gym clothes (because that seems to matter) and then worrying about if you're going to be the last kid without a partner for the activity. We also have all those quizzes, tests, DBQs, thematic essays, projects and busy-work, all in furtherance of reaching the Common Core standards, whatever that means. And then there's lunchtime...ahhh...a time when we're supposed to hang out with our friends, eat, & laugh right? Wrong...lunch time for some students can actually be the most stressful and political time of the day because who you sit with is everything. It may seem like something out of a movie or TV show but this really happens.

And then we get back on the bus where there can be more drama and stress. The bus can be all about status and popularity which is determined by where you sit and who you sit with. It's also a place where there are no teachers or adults (other than the bus driver of course who may not be looked upon with much respect). And then we finally get home, our sanctuary...a place where we can relax, listen to music, eat in peace, chat with our friends online, etc. and be with the real people who we know love us.

Now let's talk about after school activities...although they are supposed to be fun and a place where we can meet new friends, experience camaraderie and learn sportsmanship (and yes, that can happen), that's not always the case. Depending on the activity, some are riddled with cliques and students who are not willing to accept anyone who doesn't dress like them, act like them or think exactly like them.

As if that's not difficult enough, teens are also dealing with so many personal issues like body changes, new responsibilities, and figuring out who we are.

During a short time this year, I experienced what I now know was sadness....something that I now also know is also very typical for teens and I know I am not the only going through that. But it took me a while to realize that. I thought I was depressed. I thought I was different than everyone else and I thought that things would never get better. I just wanted to feel happy again. It wasn't until I began really opening up to my mom and dad and ask for their help that I was able to move forward. I did some research online about teen depression, I spoke to some friends and I went onto sites like Tumblr and saw that I was NOT alone and that what I was going through was actually normal! But I also realized that Tumblr was disorganized with how the photos, text posts, videos and gifs were posted. I wanted to look at images that were specific to sadness and teen depression. So I thought to myself, why don't I create a place online where others can visit to can get some information about what sadness and teen depression are, have a place where they can share images, stories etc. and a place where they can read, see and feel that they are not alone and that they will be OK! This is how and why the "U Will B OK" Campaign was born!

Although the specific facts of what caused my sadness are not really important (plus I don't want to make anyone feel bad), I was able to get over my sad feelings because 1.) I spoke to my parents 2.) I did research online about teen depression 3.) I visited sites like Tumblr. Creating, designing and sharing the U Will B OK website and campaign has empowered and inspired me to continue to help others who might be going through something similar to what I did.

The website is still new and I hope to make it the go-to place for teens who just want to get some support so they can feel better by reading information, looking at photos, reading other people's stories, and listening to inspirational music. Here they will not be labeled and no one will ever feel judged.

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