

I think there has historically been less acceptance and awareness about the importance of mental well-being. Our goal has been to make sure that we have the resources in place to support students and adults with modest issues all the way up to potentially significant challenges and issues that they may encounter.

■ Being vulnerable is very hard. It's very hard because you open yourself up for all kinds of things. All I'm saying is if you're willing to put yourself out there and be honest and be vulnerable, people will be drawn to that. In the long run, to live your truth in that way, will be 100 times



Director of Counselin

▲ Here, it is much harder

to open up. Boys hide their

stress really well or other

emotions if they're sad or

going through a lot. It takes

a lot more to open up and

be vulnerable, especially if

they think it's embarrass-

ing. Bottling things up is

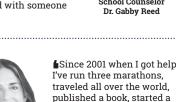
Lower & Middle

School Counselo Dr. Gabby Reed

super unhealthy.



LIf we can...find even just one person that you can talk to and say, 'Man, I'm iust really struggling with this,' I bet nine times out of 10 if you take the risk and you bring it up, that person's not gonna laugh at you. Just talking about it helps because you've connected with someone



traveled all over the world, oublished a book, started a enter that's now making discoveries that may ransform and save lives None of that would have appened if I had trusted what I believed in that garage [where I attempted suicidel. So I would just say give the future a chance. We're incapable of predicting what might happen.

▲I remember how difficult high school was for me, and I think I've gotten a huge amount of respect for you guys. I do think it is a part of our job. I do no think that we are here just to teach you academics, but also to help you become functioning adults. I'm happy to be that person



STORY Sam Ahmed, Colin Campbell, Sid Vattamreddy PHOTO ILLUSTRATION Tyler Nussbaumer

Unheard and underserved

Noah* never felt like the support system at school made a difference when it mattered the most, reflecting on his own issues.

> he next 24 hours of his life scared him. It was a struggle for Noah* just to find the motivation to get out of bed, but after, there was school, followed by the quiet drive home, until finally, he was back in bed, just to wake up without motivation the next morning.

It was at the point where getting out of bed required a seemingly impossible magic trick every morning.

This burnout hit Noah during sophomore year. The piling stress accumulated until, one day about three quarters the way through sophomore year, Noah simply broke down and resorted to self

He began dealing with his mental health issues on his own, away from the school because he didn't feel comfortable discussing his issues with the people here.

"The school doesn't really have any resources for mental health, which really disappoints me," Noah said. "I didn't see any resources, and if they are there, they are very minimal. It ended up being something I had to end up dealing with mostly on my own which sucked."

What hurt Noah even more was having to hear his fellow classmates insensitively joke about and diminish the importance of the very issue he was struggling with day in and day out.

"When it's always in the frame of a joke, it's very difficult to start an open conversation about mental health," Noah said. "It gets brought up in a way that people are desensitized to the actual impact of it."

Though Noah never turned to the support system for help, he's grateful for the people who noticed something and reached out to him to make sure everything was okav.

"I don't think that there is such a support network, and that's a big problem because the only people that actually reached out did it on their

IT FEELS LIKE THERE'S NO INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS LIKE ME. IF YOU GET HELP, IT'S BECAUSE TEACHERS ARE CONCERNED

FOR YOU AS THEIR STUDENT.

be there for him lacked the proper training and knowledge to handle his situation.

"I felt like I was being interrogated about my mental health when a coach talked to me," Noah said. "That is not a healthy way to start that discussion because I'm already ashamed about the w

Noah was able to get the help he needed by seeing a therapist and taking medication, but he worries about all the students going through similar struggles unable to get help because of the stigma surrounding mental health

"There are a lot of people that struggle with the same sort of issues, but teachers

might not help them with that or their parents might not be receptive to things like that because it is such a polarizing conversation,"

Giving advice to students like him, Noah emphasizes the importance of embracing some sort of resort to support system.

percent

as their

"The most important thing is realizing that you're not the only one that has to struggle," Noah said. "This isn't your burden to bear. People do actively care about you and they want you to get better." Going forward, Noah sees the

problem with the way mental health is handled at 10600 Preston Rd. stems from not just the students who make jokes about it but also the manner in which the administration seems to push issues under

"Change needs to happen through mental health education," Noah said. "The school needs to provide resources so that people are better equipped to deal with

different issues they en-

Two anonymous students share their perspectives of how they have dealt with mental issues during their time here on campus.

* Noah and Jake are pseudonyms for unnamed Marksman who prefer to remain anonymous.

* Lake said "Lattribute everything to

wasn't alone. He Saving a life had a support network that saved his life, but most people

All Jake can remember was at ing. Standing in the start of freshman year, he cut the middle of the himself twice. He never really took hallway in Centennial, the time to figure out what was he was nervous. He going on in his life. When junior didn't want his year came up, everything that Jake parents to find had been holding inside for the last out about the cuts couple of years finally surfaced. and scars on his One of Jake's friends reported arms. He didn't him to Director of Counseling know why he was Barbara Van Drie, and Jake was diresorting to this. All

ily, friends and teachers kept him alive and

ake* was shak-

he knew was that he

sometimes felt this

emotional chaos and

turmoil of anger, sadness

He stood, waiting to start his

One that seemed hopeless at

grow through it. The stress, the

anxiety, the depression. All by

round him every day, from

teachers to classmates to

outside resources

to parents to

leaning on people that sur-

times, but Jake has learned to

road to recovery.

supported him through the pain and struggle.

agnosed with anxiety and moderate "I was shocked when she told me her diagnosis," Jake said. "I thought that I would never have anxiety. I get good grades, and I don't procrastinate. I have literally

aren't in Jake's

position.

As junior year went on, Jake started to realize one of the main causes of his depression and anxiety: burnout.

everything that I want."

"I hit burnout, and I would say that I'm still burnt out," Jake said. "But on paper, looking at me you never see that."

One thing that Jake learned during therapy that changed his view on his life was that he only focused on pursuing meaning,

which finally flipped a switch in Jake's mind. "Pursuing happi-

ness is a trap that will leave you feeling like you haven't accomplished anything," Jake said. "I can still wake up and go to school because it gives me meaning to talk with friends and teachers to feel like I'm growing."

Opening up to nis best friends about this issue and teachers who he feels comfortable talking to, Jake credits his life to the support network that is in the community

"This support network of people who care about me has been the single

Jake said. "I attribute everything to them. I feel indebted to them. I'm perpetually grateful to them beyond

Jake doesn't know how much the all-boys environment plays into the mental health problem but thinks that most students don't feel comfortable

"We're guys, and we don't talk about sensitive stuff said. "There's always that hes-

about your feelings to someone. We need to cultivate a sense of openness because it'll only get worse if we hide these issues.

in fixing the issue is educating really exist.

Even though Jake believes there the counseling office, students

and get it," Jake said. "There should be nothing standing in your way. No one's opinion should be influencing your desire to feel better. Don't be worried about whether or not someone will make fun of you

think any person can solve mental health problems on their own; rather, interacting with others will truly "Having that support group is

for getting help," Jake said. "You can't do it alone. If you think you can, you're wrong." Learning from his own experiences, Jake offers advice to the student

who is going through the very things he has gone through. "He doesn't know who I am,

but if he sees me up on the quad and wants to just talk to me about anything, I'm willing," Jake said. "You just have to take the first really scary step to just tell them what's been going on. Afterward, you'll just be so thankful that you did it. The only thing you can do is just trying to lie to yourself."

words can even express."

opening up.

I TOLD MYSELF, IT'S OKAY WHETHER I FEEL SAD OR HAP-PY BECAUSE I KNOW I STILL so often," Jake HAVE TO KEEP ON WORKING ON GROWING AS A PERSON.

itancy to talk

In Jake's opinion, the first step students on what mental illnesses

"I never knew how anxiety and depression ever manifested, so educating students on mental health would be good," Jake said. "Creating awareness about it and fostering a means of communication will change everything."

is a stigma that exists of going into should go get help if they want it.

"If you want help, you should go

In order to get help, Jake doesn't

probably the most essential thing

numbers

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by the

(age 3-17) have been diagnosed with anxiety

of children have been diagnosed with depression

diagnosed with a behavior problem

of children with anxiety received treatment

When I got

so over-

whelmed,

I would get this really

sick feeling

in my gut.

hit a wall a

few nights

would go

to bed at

because 1

felt so ex-

physically

like 10 p.m.

of children with behavior orders received treatment

of children diagnosed with depression have also been diagnosed with anxiety

of children with anxiety have also been diagnosed depression

of U.S. children (age 2-8) had a diagnosed mental, behavior, or development

'So yes, I, Sam Ahmed, have been experiencing anxiety'

his cover story has changed my life. Let me explain At the start of 2020, I got a call. Then, I got a text and a Snapchat, and then, someone stopped me in the hall. These were all people that needed to talk because they were going through hell. I always ended every conversation with, "If you ever need to talk, I'm always here."

From that point on, hearing about a couple of other personal stories, I knew we had to cover this issue. And throughout the process, I started to realize that I have been going through similar things myself and have never been honest about the actual severity of my issues.

I, Sam Ahmed, have been experiencing anxiety. It started back in junior year. Before winter break, I

physically couldn't breathe. I hugged my laptop against my chest waiting for this nightmare to be over. It wasn't caused by homework or workload; I knew what I signed up for and was managing it. It just happened out of the blue. I couldn't control it and didn't know how to deal with it.

But this hasn't just been a one-time thing, this has been something that I have dealt with ever since that year. At first, they thought it was allergies; then, they thought it was asthma related, consequently pumping my body full of albuterol only to realize that the medicine was making it worse.

own," Noah said.

Although

the people who

checked in with

Noah had good

intentions, he was

disappointed that

the only people at

school seeming to

It made me jumpy, unstable, erratic, a nervous wreck. I couldn't sit still. I started to get scared. Scared of what was

happening to me. Why couldn't I execute the most basic of human tasks of breathing? Next, they thought it was a heart condition. Teachers seemed concerned when I, a 17-year-

old boy at the time, told them that I had to go to the cardiologist. And when they asked, "Are you okay?" I genuinely didn't know. That was the scariest part of it all. No one knew what it was, when it was going to stop or how it was going to be fixed. I spent the next two weeks trying to get my mind off of it, spending it with friends and watching

After hours of visits to the cardiologist, they found no issue. A sigh of relief hit me, but then,

I got angry. I wasn't any closer to figuring out the issue than I had been eight months earlier. They referred me to a pulmonologist, but my hopes were low. April rolled around, and I had my first appointment. After a couple tests, I finally had a diagnosis: Vocal cord dysfunction (VCD). With VCD, the vocal cord muscles tighten, which makes breathing difficult. My asthma and anxiety compounded together to

cause this issue

Sam Ahmed

I went back to school that day feeling happy for once that year: happy that I was getting help, that I knew what was wrong and that I could finally be-(continued, next page)

But now as I have gone through treatment, I don't know if things will ever get better. There is no medicine, surgery, cure, solution or quick fix. I have only been given complicated breathing techniques that only sometimes makes things better.

Throughout senior year, I started to get panic and anxiety attacks, gasping for the last breath of air in my lungs. And more than that, during these last couple of months, I would walk into class feeling empty and purposeless. Most times, I didn't feel anything.

I felt like I was a stranger in my own body. Sometimes, I would drive home and just cry for no apparent reason and still feel nothing. I tried everything to feel something. On the outside, everything seemed like it was going well, but on the inside, I felt meaningless and lost.

I started getting hereditary migraines and tension headaches from the anxiety at the start of senior year. At the end of 2019, I found myself with a neurologist, poked, prodded and scanned, having to get an MRI, MRA and CT. After I was cleared of any "real" issue, I was put on a couple different medicines. Some made my whole body go numb; others changed my mood, turning me into someone I hated seeing in the mirror every day. Now, I'm on a medication that makes me extremely tired.

But through all the pain, I have made a promise to **someone.** A promise to talk to people about my struggles. Some friends know about my difficulty breathing from volleyball and some people know about my issues this year. But no one knows the full story about how I spent my whole junior year in fear of not being able to breathe. About how I have spent senior year with anxiety and have not done anything about it.

So yes, I, Sam Ahmed, have anxiety, and you probably never would have guessed it.

What has made this process so much worse is that I have tried to keep this to myself even when people have reached out. As I wrote this cover story, I realized I want to be more open with people about this issue. Every person I have interviewed said the people they talked to changed their lives, so I want to do the same.

So far, it's worked. I feel better with each and every person I talk to, and this sense of emptiness has started to leave me and is replaced with that same motivated Sam that I love and missed.

And I know my problems are nowhere close to the issues that other Marksmen go through on a day-to-day basis, but maybe writing this column will help others in our community talk to someone about what they are going through.

Maybe you, who is reading this column, find yourself in a similar situation and haven't reached out to anybody. My one piece of advice after this whole cover story and grappling with my own issues is to talk to someone. It will help; I promise. Unfortunately, it took me over a year to realize that. Throughout this whole process, I have finally begun to love myself again.

To my teachers, please don't give me special treatment because of this. Odds are that there is probably someone else in class that is going through something worse. And to the students, faculty and staff, please don't look at me differently and ask if I need help. Thank you, but I've finally got it. I just hope that with this column we can start having these sorts of conversations on campus but never desensitize people from the actual issue. It all starts with educating students on mental health and putting in the resources to deal with people who are truly struggling. And always know that I'm here for you, whether you

see me in the halls or have never talked to me before. — You aren't alone. —