

else if a book falls on the floor, to jump.”

According to the Alvarado Parkway Institute, a center for mental health and addictive disorders, these high baseline levels of anxiety can develop from a multitude of environmental, genetic and medical factors. Depending on the person, anxiety can begin with a genetic predisposition, childhood trauma, medical conditions that produce certain hormones, abusive relationships, long-term stress or a combination.

Nijmeijer developed intense anxiety during her middle school years due to the combination of moving to a new school, friend group fluctuation and academic stress that is a part of growing up.

**“You want to put it aside,  
but you can’t.  
It is like a shadow.”  
—Rasleen Saran**

“My anxiety was genetically predisposed,” Nijmeijer said. “I also struggled with perfectionism for a very, very long time, which was not helped by the academic rigor of our school.”

A common misconception people have is that avoiding stress will cure anxiety. This is not only not true, but also unrealistic because, as in Nijmeijer’s experience, balancing academics, personal life and work is bound to get stressful at some point or another. Avoiding anxiety-inducing situations can exacerbate the problem because one is not using any tools to process emotions and overcome them. The saying “face your fears” applies because the more someone avoids their fears, the bigger they become.

People experience and manage their anxiety differently. Nijmeijer finds comfort in journaling about her feelings and the positives in her life as well as keeping a clean room. Over the years, she has acquired beneficial tools to calm herself in stressful situations such as a method called grounding.

“Notice three things you can see, three things you can touch, three things you can hear and three things you can taste,” Nijmeijer said. “Something to put you in your environment.”

Similarly, Saran shared that suppressing one’s anxiety can actually make it worse because it bottles up and creates more stress. Accepting the situation and waiting for the storm to pass can quicken the recovery and ultimately help one to feel more peace in the end.

“It is OK if people see you crying because your mental health is more important than what other people are thinking about you,” Saran said.

Associating anxiety with weakness is one reason why people can be hesitant to be vulnerable about mental health struggles. This lack of communication creates a lack of understanding, which promotes the stigmatization of mental illnesses. Switching the discussion of mental health from a shame-based way to a compassionate way can encourage more people to speak out about mental health and help those who are suffering. Pantoja feels that having more people with a greater awareness of anxiety and its effects would benefit him.

“I would feel more comfortable doing certain things because

# YOU ARE NOT ALONE

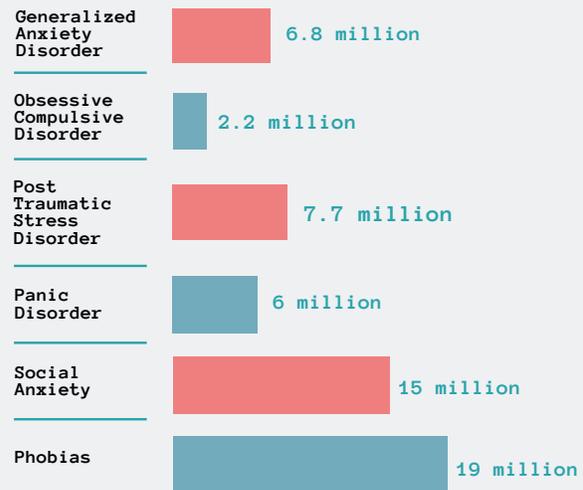
Anxiety is the most common mental illness in the United States

## IN THE U.S.

18.1% of the population struggle with anxiety disorders each year



## TYPES OF ANXIETY



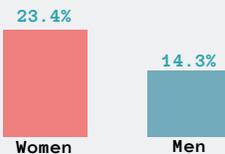
## 1 IN 8

children are diagnosed with anxiety disorders



## BY GENDER

Anxiety rates are significantly higher in women than in men



Compiled by Jenna Plasschaert

Sources:

<https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>  
<https://www.mindfulsearching.com/anxiety-statistics/>  
<https://adaa.org/find-help-for/women/anxiety>

people would understand why,” Pantoja said. “In the case of sharpening a pencil, people will think, ‘He doesn’t like being stared at. Maybe I shouldn’t do that.’”

As the talk of mental health and anxiety increases, those struggling will be more likely to reach out for help, whether that is from friends, family or licensed professionals. Nijmeijer and Saran have both experienced growth after attending therapy and feel they have better control over their anxiety.

When asked if there was anything else they wanted to share, Nijmeijer and Saran both answered the same way:

“It gets better.”