

IMPORTANT DATES

January & February

11TH GRADE FAMILY COLLEGE MEETINGS CONTINUE

Our 10th-12th Grade Counselors work hard to provide individualized college guidance to our students and this service can be extremely beneficial in post-secondary planning. We will share January and February appointment options on January 10th.

January 18th COURSE ADD DEADLINE

This is the last day to add a course to your 2nd semester schedule. As always, Schedule Change Request Forms are available in Schoology Counseling Courses.

January 14th & 17th NO SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS

Please take some intentional time for self-care!

Cycle 3 10TH GRADE YOU SCIENCE PRESENTATIONS

Our 10th-12th Grade Counselors will walk all 10th graders through self assessments by You Science, in an effort to help provide self awareness and personal development for our students. It is our hope that these assessments will assist in academic goal setting and post-secondary planning.

Cycle 3 9TH GRADE SCOIR PRESENTATIONS

Our 9th Grade Counselor will assist all 9th graders in registration and exploration of SCOIR, which is Mercy's college search and application tool.

February 3rd COURSE DROP DEADLINE

This is the last day to drop a course from our 2nd semester schedule. As always, Schedule Change Request Forms are available in Schoology Counseling Courses.

5 Ways to: Use music therapeutically

Messages Impact Mood

Practices in Cognitive Behavior Therapy are based on the fundamental idea that the messages we think and say about ourselves, impact how we feel, which impacts our choices and behaviors.

The messages we receive through song lyrics can have a direct impact on our mood.

Curate Your Supportive Soundtrack

Take a moment to create multiple playlists: one for feeling sad, one for feeling anger, a happy playlist, a celebration playlist...you get it.

Lyrics, beats, chords, transitions, and over all vibes in music can help us sit in a mood or feeling or can help change a mood or feeling.

Have these playlists at the ready for when you need them!

Create Your Own

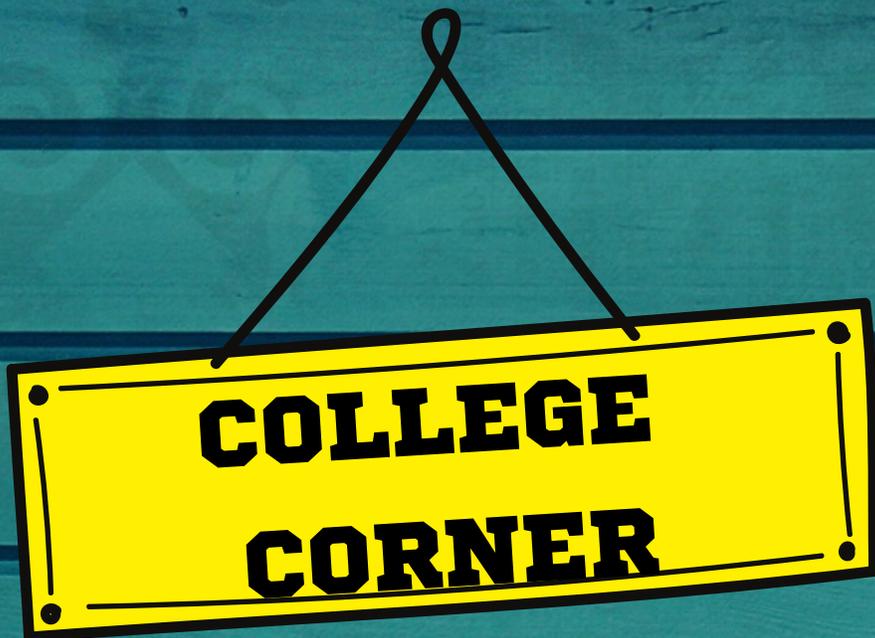
If you have a lot of feelings and thoughts that are haunting you, write them down!! Bonus points if you can get creative and turn them into song lyrics. Create your own music if that is in your wheelhouse, or simply add them to a song you already know. The point, similar to journaling, is to take your thoughts and feelings from your head and put them out into the universe.

Look Into the Roots of a Song

If you find a song that really speaks to you or helps you deal with life, do a little research into the back story behind the artist or band responsible for the song. Knowing someone else's story, especially if personally relatable, can help us better manage whatever stress we are under.

Pick Your Theme Song

You know how athletes have a song that plays as they walk up to bat or enter the boxing ring? This song represents them, pumps them up, and sets the tone as they prepare to perform. What is your theme song? Choose this song and play it or sing it in your head when you need a mood boost or shift in attitude.



College Fairs

by NACAC

Virtual College Fairs

ATTEND A NACAC VIRTUAL COLLEGE FAIR TO CONNECT WITH HUNDREDS OF COLLEGES ON EACH FAIR DATE. WATCH PRESENTATIONS, ASK QUESTIONS, AND DEMONSTRATE INTEREST... ALL WITHOUT LEAVING HOME.

[Learn more here](#)

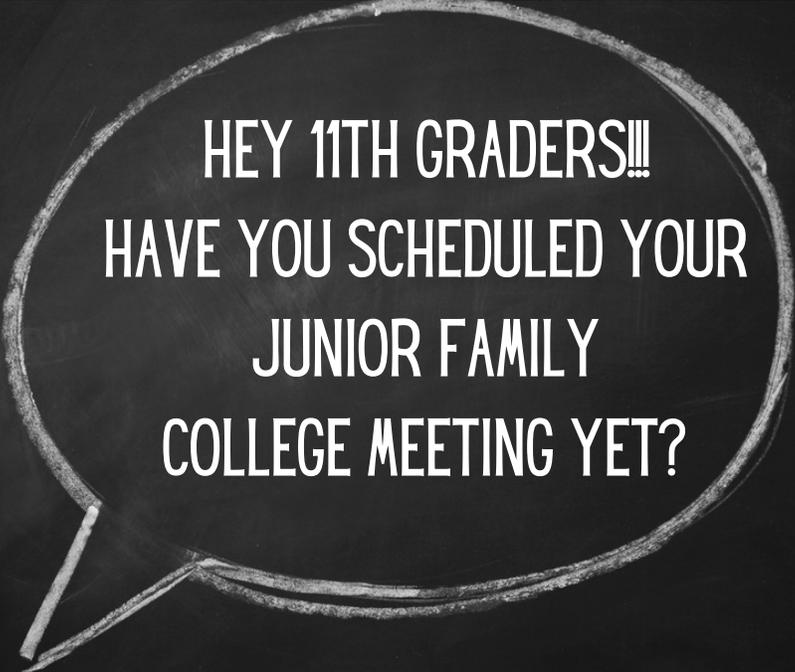


Virtual College Fairs

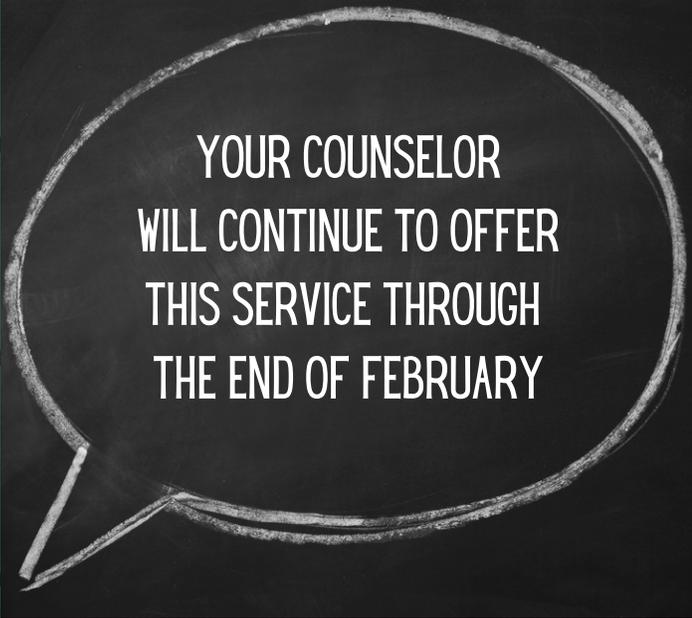
NACAC HOSTS IN-PERSON EVENTS IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA, TO ALLOW HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ACCESS TO ADMISSION ADVISERS FROM HUNDREDS OF INSTITUTIONS.

[Learn more here](#)

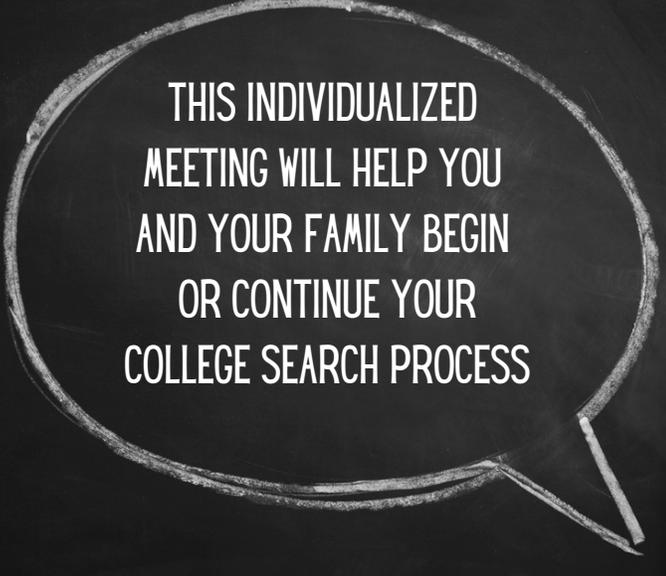




**HEY 11TH GRADERS!!!
HAVE YOU SCHEDULED YOUR
JUNIOR FAMILY
COLLEGE MEETING YET?**



**YOUR COUNSELOR
WILL CONTINUE TO OFFER
THIS SERVICE THROUGH
THE END OF FEBRUARY**



**THIS INDIVIDUALIZED
MEETING WILL HELP YOU
AND YOUR FAMILY BEGIN
OR CONTINUE YOUR
COLLEGE SEARCH PROCESS**



**ACCESS TO
JANUARY AND FEBRUARY
APPOINTMENTS WILL BE SHARED
WITH YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES
VIA EMAIL
ON MONDAY, JANUARY 10TH**

My Anxiety Journey

A QUICK INTRO

This month, in an effort to continue to educate the Mercy community about anxiety and the importance of mental health treatment, I have decided to share a bit about my personal journey with Anxiety and Agoraphobia. I've mapped out each pit-stop here, in case anyone would prefer to take a detour around the more personal elements and short cut to the informational parts of this trip. (I promise: moving forward, no more "journey" puns.)

A LITTLE SCIENCE

Professionally, I know Anxiety very well. I have a certification in the Treatment of Anxiety Disorders in Children & Adolescents. I know that messages and feelings of anxiety manifest in the part of our brain called the **amygdala**. I know that sometimes, our amygdala gets it wrong, sending **unnecessary panic messages**. I know that the brain has this incredible neuroplasticity, which allows us to "reprogram" the brain and teach our amygdala to better interpret safe vs. unsafe situations. I also know the formula and behaviors necessary for said reprogramming.

What I did not know, until recently, was how to recognize clinical level anxiety in myself.

HOW IT STARTED FOR ME

My anxiety story begins during 2020, while locked down. There was a lot to worry about for all of us. For me personally, I had been adjusting to working remotely for both Mercy and my private practice, alongside my husband who was working remotely, while we managed our child's remote schooling. It was a lot to deal with, although our tiny family totally rallied and somehow figured out a way to make it work most days. During the more challenging moments, we were able to find healthy ways to cope and support one another. I live in a neighborhood with a really cool, old-school mentality. We are a village. We support each other and raise our kids together. During this time, we checked in on each other daily and provided support for each other whenever we could. Friends and family members were all supporting each other from our homes. Although strange and scary, life was very "We're All in This Together" for me at the start of the pandemic.

Over time though, things started to really add up, I was flooded with rapid fire **panic messages**, and life became increasingly overwhelming for me. Stressor by stressor and trauma by trauma, I could quite literally feel my defense skills weakening and my mental health beginning to suffer.

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There was the typical 2020 Covid19 related stuff of course; non-stop cancellations; positive cases on a mad rise; and the fear of getting, or worse in my opinion, *spreading* Covid19. Anxiety showed up daily, telling me that the world as I knew it was uncertain and unsafe. Additionally, full-time, remote work as a School Counselor and my part time role as a Therapist became increasingly challenging. With incredible limitations, I was working so hard to support so many people from home-and when Anxiety showed up, my amygdala lied to me, telling me that there was no way I could make a difference for anyone. I also received panic messages doubting my abilities as a Parent, because of course, I feared for the impact this experience would have on my own child's development and mental health. This weighed heavily on my heart every day.

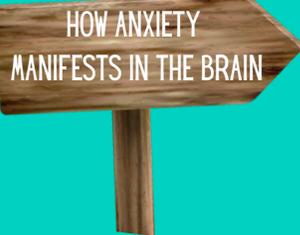
My brother is a Detroit Fire Fighter. His experience as a first responder during this time is like nothing I've ever heard. Things in Detroit were so extreme that his department started a 2 option protocol for covid related calls: 1. Provide transport to a hospital, or 2. Pronounce dead on arrival. He was often called to the same home more than once in a shift, transporting multiple members of the same family to the hospital, or worse. I worried a lot about his physical and mental health during each shift he worked, because anxiety would show up and would want absolute certainty that he was okay.

My husband works in IT for a large health system and in April of 2020, he was charged with the responsibility of "Lead Architect for the Rapid Response Covid Team". This meant that he was on call 24/7. He had to install this giant, weird office phone next to our bed. Anytime that Bat-Phone rang, night or day, he had to take the call and build something covid related in the electronic medical records system. Every time I looked at that phone, I felt anxious.

We were drowning in covid stories, covid data, covid trauma, and covid tragedies. It felt like any time we were awake, there was just constant concern, fear, uncertainty, disappointment, and covid talk. It was swirling around us and validating my anxious thoughts.

I began believing the lies my amygdala told me. Anxiety wanted absolute certainty that everything would be okay. It wanted to know that everyone was safe, that I was safe. Anxiety wanted reassurance that things were under control and that I had control over my life. Our amygdala does this when it misfires-it wants to find a way to ease discomfort, escape uncertainty, and find what will bring our brain to a state of calm and resolution. Sometimes, these things are not possible. Further, sometimes, these things are actually not what our brain needs at all.

Simply put, our amygdala is responsible for a concept you are likely familiar with called "fight or flight". An easy way to explain this is that as our brain interprets the information in front of us, and if our amygdala perceives that a situation is unsafe, it will flood other parts of our brain with panic messages and our brain and body will receive hormones to help us prepare to fight or to flee. For example, if my path randomly crosses with a bear (an accurate unsafe situation), my amygdala will quickly decide that I am unsafe and will either prepare me to escape; by providing me with a boost of adrenaline and preparing my legs and feet with everything they need to evade the situation as quickly as possible, or, my brain will prepare me to fight the bear, by engaging my muscles, altering my posture, and turning on any physical defense skills I may have in my brain arsenal.



HOW ANXIETY
MANIFESTS IN THE BRAIN

So again, sometimes our amygdala gets it wrong. An example of such a situation might be something social. Let's say that I am walking into a social scene that is new to me; I do not know anyone in the room, I do not feel confident about entering into this scene, and my discomfort quickly morphs into intense worry and anxious feelings. Because my initial interpretation is that I am socially or emotionally unsafe, my amygdala wants to help me return to a balanced state, rather than an anxious one. So again, I will receive panic messages and a hormonal response telling me to avoid that situation or fight it, which is totally unnecessary. And here is the worst part: any time we listen to anxiety and give it what it wants, our amygdala is validated. So, if I bailed on the social scene I just described, my worry and anxiety would dissipate temporarily, and my amygdala will think: "Okay, yeah! I got it right! Situations like that are unsafe and we should run from them." So, the next time I find myself socially uncomfortable, my amygdala will again, send me panic messages and the cycle of anxiety will continue; interfering with my social development.

When we give unhealthy anxiety what it wants, my mentor calls this "doing the disorder". And this is exactly what I started to do in my own life.



GETTING PERSONAL
AGAIN

Soon after starting to suffer from daily anxiety, a tornado of additional stressors hit my life quickly. Within the span of 2 months; a family member of mine ended his own life in a public and horrific way (so anxiety told me that my family members are not okay and that I needed to know every detail as well as somehow feel for every witness of his death), my child had an injury (so anxiety told me: "the world is unsafe for your child, you are an unfit mother, and your kid is now taking up time and space at the hospital that is much needed for covid patients"), my Father was hospitalized, needing emergency surgery, (again, worry, worry, worry), neighbors died from covid19, and my brother's mental health began to take a really scary turn (you get the panic message picture). My personal life was crumbling and each day felt harder to cope with than the one before it.

And then, humanity started to feel divided, rather than unified against this disease. My family, my friends, and the public in general started to split into strong

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STILL PESONAL

opposing views regarding covid19. Conflicting data and information began to transpire and spread wildly. Next came the horrific murder of George Floyd and a subsequent further divide in humanity. Absolutely nothing felt "All in This Together" and it terrified me. Every day there was new hurt, new anger, and new sadness. I have never watched the news really, as it just always makes me so sad. During this time though, because anxiety told me I had to, I developed an unhealthy coping mechanism of mindlessly scrolling through social media and digesting information about covid stats, BLM, my cousin's death, and other horrifying news. Professionally, I deal with hurt and sadness daily-most often very well. This experience was different for me though, as I found myself digesting everything-my own trauma, the trauma of my students and clients, and even of complete strangers-and I felt less equipped to feel anything or support anyone, including myself. I eventually began an emotional cycle between total numbness and severe anxiety for months. There was no in-between.

For me, what started off as a mama bear fight response ("I'm going to do everything I can to protect myself and others from this disease!"), shrunk into a mouse-like, fear based response. Somewhere along the way, I allowed anxiety to call the shots and I just stopped leaving the house because: A. it was the only place that felt remotely safe, and B. life's new structure allowed it-work was remote, events were cancelled, our groceries were easily delivered, and Amazon Prime was key. I totally "did the disorder" and would not leave my home, other than to go to work at Mercy, for a very long time.

At a certain point, I realized how much of myself I had lost and started to notice that I was not "buying" anything I "sell" to my clients or students about the anxiety cycle. So, I jumped back into Therapy, got on a temporary anti-anxiety medication, and got to work.



THE
ANXIETY CYCLE

The anxiety cycle essentially has 4 parts:

1. Anxiety is triggered and we receive panic messages
2. We react with avoidance or defiance
3. Anxiety reduces temporarily
4. Our amygdala remembers the trigger and the response for the future

So, here is how we break the **anxiety cycle** in 5 steps:

Step One: Notice when anxiety shows up

Start to pay attention to what anxiety feels like, looks like, and sounds like for you specifically. For me, I get very quiet, I have many anxious thoughts, I feel my heart rate increase, I tighten up in the jaw, maybe the hands, and I fidget for comfort stimulation.

Step Two: Label the anxiety

Although cringey, this is the most important part of this process. You must pause and say out loud (or think it purposefully if you are not in a position where you can talk to yourself or others) something like: "I am feeling anxious" or "This is anxiety". or "Shut up amygdala!"

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BREAKING THE
ANXIETY CYCLE

Step Two is important because we are training our brain to better recognize when anxiety shows up. Consciously noticing and labeling this feeling will help our amygdala to eventually change our reaction to the trigger in front of us.

Step Three: Face the trigger, do not avoid the trigger

Again, sometimes anxiety shows up to keep us legitimately safe. In situations where we are trying to break an unhealthy anxiety cycle though, immediately avoiding what triggers our anxiety would be "doing the disorder", or validating our amygdala and perpetuating the anxiety cycle. We must face our triggers.



BREAKING THE
ANXIETY CYCLE
CONTINUED

Step Four: Cope with the anxiety and triggering situation

This is the hardest part. The feelings of worry or anxiety that come up are still valid feelings that should not be ignored. So, the trick is finding a few coping methods that work for you and your needs, specifically. Trial and error will lead you to your personalized list of coping skills that you can bust out in times anxiety, worry, or stress. (Just to be clear, I suggest that you literally make a list-in your phone, on paper, email yourself, etc.)

Step Five: High five yourself

However you do it, you must take a moment to recognize when you've successfully punched the anxiety cycle in the face. Similarly to how Step One will help our amygdala with accurate interpretation, noting a healthy anxiety response for yourself will validate the response you created and will teach your amygdala how to better respond to your needs in the future. This is a lot like Savasana or "corpse pose" in yoga, where a moment of pause is necessary to allow our brain to absorb what our body has learned.

Next: repeat, repeat, repeat.

With mild to moderate, situational anxiety, this process can be totally self directed and successful. It takes work and self love. When it comes to treatment of Anxiety Disorders, this process is most effective with the support of a great Therapist, healthy lifestyle choices, and for some, anti-anxiety medication.

As for me, I, like you, am a work in progress. Although anxiety still shows up for me way more often than it did pre-covid19, I no longer "do the disorder". I've totally overcome Agoraphobia (high five!), I'm able to accurately ID anxiety when it shows up, I have an arsenal of coping skills to utilize when it does, and I've recently weaned off of my daily anti-anxiety medication. I work hard to punch anxiety in the face every day.

As for you, if you want support in managing feelings of anxiety or would like to learn more about anxiety, please reach out or stop by. I'm lucky that I'm not on this journey alone and you should not be alone on your journey either.

Written by Mercy Counselor, Mrs. Trish Brown

Take a Moment to Try... Art Therapy

OF THE ENDLESS WAYS YOU CAN TAP INTO MENTAL HEALTH CARE EFFORTS, ART THERAPY MAY BE THE MOST DIVERSE AND MOST APPLICABLE THERAPEUTIC APPROACH OF THEM ALL! THERE ARE SO MANY SELF-DIRECTED ART THERAPY TECHNIQUES FOR ALL HUMAN BEINGS-NO ART SKILLS REQUIRED.



WHAT IS ON YOUR HEART TODAY?

DIRECTIONS:

- PRINT THIS PAGE OR USE A PDF EDITOR
- MAKE A QUICK MENTAL OR PHYSICAL LIST OF YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS IN THIS MOMENT
(LABEL YOUR FEELINGS, IDENTIFY ANY THOUGHTS OR WANTS, WORRIES, JOYS, GOALS, ETC.)
- THINK METAPHORICALLY: WHAT COLORS AND OR SHAPES REPRESENT HOW YOU'RE FEELING & THINKING TODAY?
- DRAW A HEART IN THE WHITE SPACE ABOVE & FILL THAT SHAPE WITH THE METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF EVERYTHING IN OR ON YOUR HEART IN THIS MOMENT.

THERE IS A LOT OF GARBAGE AND HATE OUT THERE.
LOOKING FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

Scan Here for a Laugh



Scan Here to Learn A New Skill



Scan Here to Feel Good



Save your
Breath

Per the research conducted by The Truth Initiative (an organization working to inspire nicotine free lives), 1 in every 5 high school students were vaping in 2020. Teen e-cigarette use is at epidemic level concern.

It's pretty simple:

(again, per The Truth Initiative)

- Nicotine levels in vape device cartridges are highly potent and addictive.
- Teenage brains are more likely to become addicted.
- Once addicted, younger brains have more difficulty quitting.
- Teens addicted to nicotine are at a higher risk of additional addictions.

Are you
ready to quit?

That is amazing. You'll need some support.

Text: DITCHVAPE

To: 88709

(this is free and anonymous)

OR

Click

[HERE](#)

for more info first



truthinitiative.org



Funded by



Oakland Community
Health Network

Developmental Disabilities • Mental Health • Substance Recovery

NEW OAKLAND
FAMILY CENTERS

Oakland County YOUTH MOBILE CRISIS TEAM

877-800-1650

For families and individuals across Oakland County, **Youth Mobile Crisis Services** are available to help teens, young adults and children who are experiencing a mental health crisis. Provided by **New Oakland Family Centers**, the services of the Oakland County youth mobile crisis program involve:

- **Rapid mobile response** with therapists who come to your location to help
- **On-the-spot counseling** by mental health professionals to help stabilize emotional and/or behavioral functioning
- **Assessment and coordination** for continued stabilization
- **Connections and referrals** to ongoing services and supports for individuals and families

ACCEPT THE MAGIC OF MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND DELAYED EXPERIENCES. TAKE COMFORT IN CANCELLED PLANS AND DENIED WISHES. BE THANKFUL FOR ROMANTIC REJECTIONS AND FAILED FRIENDSHIPS. TRUST THAT EVERY OBSTACLE YOU FACE HAS BEEN PLACED IN FRONT OF YOU TO REDIRECT YOU TO THE PATH THAT'S MEANT FOR YOU.

@POSITIVELYPRESENT