

My name is Joe and I work for San Mateo County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services. Since 1999, I have gone through chronic episodes of severe depression and anxiety. When I'm feeling depressed, I don't want to get out of bed, I'm not motivated to do anything, and I go weeks without eating much. I beat myself up over the smallest things, believe I'm not good enough and hate myself for feeling so weak. My anxiety attacks usually come in the middle of the night. I wake up feeling this sense of dread like something bad is about to happen to me. I'm sweating, breathing fast and my heart is racing. When this happens, I feel worried, nervous and anxious, and can only sleep a few hours a night. When I don't get sleep, I can't focus on work, or on other things I need to do.

I've been very good at hiding my mental health challenges from my family, friends and co-workers. I usually laugh a lot and have a big smile on my face, but that just hides what's going on inside me. As a Filipino and a Catholic, I was raised to believe that my depression and anxiety were due to a lack of faith. Now, I know different.

I started seeing a therapist a few years after my first episodes started, and I visit my therapist whenever I go through these bouts of depression and anxiety. Therapy has helped me a lot, and I've learned to accept the things I can't change and to be happy with who I am. I still experience times of depression and anxiety for sometimes weeks at a time, but I get the help I need once I feel myself going down that path. Having faith in God, the support of my family and friends and being physically active gives me hope, as does the knowledge that time heals all wounds. Accepting my weaknesses, but not blaming myself for them, makes me a stronger person today.

**- Joe, San Mateo**



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