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### Hide Your Tears

Imagine this: You are a 19-year-old female that has had a rough week with school and at work. Now it is Friday evening, and you just got home from work after another stressful day, and all you want to do is be able to come home and relax. After some time, you are laying down in your room watching Netflix and planning out what school assignments need to be completed first. As you think about all the work that you must complete, you start to become stressed and overwhelmed causing you to break down. This seems like a normal thing that would happen in a teenage female's life, and many people would feel for her because she is going through a relatable stressful time, but now let's change one thing about the story. Instead of the character being a female, they are male. For many people, changing that one detail makes a whole different story. A male character's feelings are not as validated or seen. They say that we as men should not show our emotions, and in this story, many people would see it as, "He is just overreacting," or "He will be fine it is not that big of a deal." As an 18-year-old male that has struggled with showing my emotion, I believe that gender should have no influence on the validity of one's emotion. Everyone is going to have emotions, and everyone is going to have bad days, but it does not matter if you are male, female, or whatever you choose to identify as. Everyone struggles with their own problems, and no one should invalidate those feelings or make you feel less than because of it.

In society men are viewed as stronger, whether physically or emotionally, and this is because we are taught to be strong, stay strong, and put aside our emotions to be strong for others as we navigate life and everything that it throws at us. Throughout our early teen years till now, we have seen males showing their emotions online, which is a good thing because it shows younger males that it is okay to not be okay, but once you go look at the comments on that post people are quickly to invalidate the emotions of the male and shut them down. Most of the time people do not see the problems as enough, because others are going through worse so we should suck it up and deal with it ourselves. You may be thinking, does this really have an impact on anything? The answer is yes, the suicide rate in males has consistently been over double of what the female rate has been. This is because females are more likely to reach out to people for help, compared to males who are less likely to reach out and get the help that they need, because they are taught to keep their emotions to themselves and handle it on their own.

Even I used to believe that burying my emotions and keeping them to myself would be the best way to get through things, and that is what I did. That is what I thought I was supposed to do because I did not want to be seen as weaker or less than for showing my emotion, like what I was seeing happened to other males that showed their emotion. I had a male friend, named David, David was going through some family and relationship problems, and he expressed his emotion to our friend group about how he was feeling. Almost instantly someone said, “Oh, you will be fine.” When I heard this, I was in shock that someone would be so quick to shut down someone’s emotions, especially when they had built up the strength to talk to the people, he thought he could trust. Two nights later I get a text from, he said, “Hey, I don’t really have anyone else to reach out to, can we talk?”. So, I did what a good friend would do, and I picked up another one of our friends and I went there to talk to him about whatever he needed. We were

there listening to what he had to say, we were acknowledging what he was saying, and we supported him. The hardest step to get help is reaching out for it, as a male it is scary because you do not know how people are going to react, if they are going to understand, or if they will actually hear what you have to say and help you find help. When this all happened, it made me realize that maybe holding in my own feelings and not reaching will lead me down the wrong path. Yet, after that moment I still could not build up the courage to seek help or talk to someone about it. But one thing can change your whole thought process.

It was a September morning and I had woken up a little later than usual because the day before we were at the State Fair with our family. I went about my morning as usual, making coffee, taking the dogs for a walk, etc. After the walk I was sitting in the living room with my mom watching TV, my dad was outside mowing the lawn, and my brothers were either in their rooms or not at home. My mom gets a phone call from my grandma, but it is my aunt speaking. Instantly my aunt said something to my mom, at this point I do not know what she had said, but I see my mom's emotion, body language, and life all shift in that moment. My mom started to freak out and started to cry. She ran through the house and out the back door, where my dad was mowing the lawn, and she dropped to the ground still crying. My dad realizes and stops the lawn mower and asks what is going on. I'm standing at the sliding glass door, and my mom says through her tears, "Jacob killed himself", but since it was unclear to my dad what she just said he said, "What?", and because my mom cannot control herself, I said it to him. Once those words left my mouth I completely broke down. Jacob was my uncle on my mom's side of the family. We all sat in the living room crying and waiting for one of my mom's friends to come pick her up and bring her to my grandma's house, where it had happened. I spent the rest of that day

sitting in my room crying and doing nothing, I was not on my phone, I was not watching TV, I was just in my room staring at the wall with my mind racing and crying.

During that time all I was thinking about was how we had seen him the day before at the State Fair, it seemed to be a great day for all of us, my aunt even got engaged that day. Even though that last day was great, I still think back to it all the time and wish it would have done something different, because there was never a proper goodbye, it was “see you next week”, but now there was no see you next week. He had written a letter before he decided to take his own life, in which he stated that he had felt like he couldn’t reach out for help, how he tried facing all his problems alone, but he couldn’t do it anymore. After we had all found out what happened, my mom got all my brothers and I in the living room and she talked to us. The conversation was her telling us that no matter what the problem is, little or small, to always come to her or reach out to a friend and just talk to her or them about whatever is on your mind that is bothering you. After we had this conversation my whole thought process changed, I never wanted to keep how I felt about things hidden or to myself, because I knew what it could look like if all I did was keep things to myself. Even after that conversation my oldest brother and I talked about how if we ever needed anything we could talk to each other, no matter the topic, and if we needed to get more help than that, then we would help each other go about finding what we need.

All things considered, these are the conversations that people should be having, it showed my brothers and I, that it is okay to not be okay and are feeling will be heard and help is put there if we need it. Males do not always need to be the strong ones, we can be vulnerable and show our sensitive side and we should not be ashamed to do so, the willingness to be vulnerable shows true strength. Men should be able to show their emotion and not have society think less of them because they are emotional. Everyone has emotions, and everyone should get the same

opportunity to deal with those feelings. I do believe that some people are starting to recognize that men can show emotion and it should be discussed more so that younger males are not growing up and seeing that men should not show their emotion. Men shouldn't hide their emotions from others because of how some people may think or feel about you but show your tears so that other men can see how there are ways or talking about their emotions and to get help for themselves. It is okay to not be okay, no matter who you are.