Hospitalization disproves common misconceptions

When most people hear “mental hospital,” they think of padded walls, white gowns, and people held down by restraints. They never really think that they will land themselves in a place like this. When I first found out I would have to be hospitalized, I was scared. I had a million questions run through my head: “What does it really mean? What do I tell my friends? What do I tell my family?”

I was told by a police officer standing outside my room: “How much will this ambulance ride cost?” Let me tell you right now, I soon realized none of these questions mattered.

In the past school year, over 50 Gunn students have been hospitalized for suicidal attempts or ideation. It is not uncommon. All of the nurses tell parents that being diagnosed for mental illness is the same thing as being diagnosed and treated for any other disease.

At a mental hospital, you meet so many other kids who have gone through similar struggles as you. There are kids who have faced far worse than you have as well as those who seem to have no reason to stain their lives. There are no padded walls or restraints. Although there are rules to follow, there are also people who understand you and want you to get better.

The desire to end your own life is not always reasonable or acceptable; however, all feelings are valid. It is so difficult to understand depression and anxiety when you have not gone through it yourself. Remember a few years ago in Living Skills, I heard about not being able to get out of bed and not wanting to go out with friends and thinking that was a ridiculous. But I also remember just a few short months ago when I started skipping at least one class per day and I lost interest in every single assignment. Soon I only went to one or two classes a day, and my grades began to reflect that. I stopped going out with my friends because I was not having fun. Scary thoughts filled my head every single day. I knew I needed help.

Asking for help with a mental illness is not a sign of weakness. The demon to your head cannot be faced alone. Since my hospitalization, there have been ups and downs. There is no immediate cure or recovery for depression and anxiety, but there is hope. There are so many people out there who are willing to help you. I have since met therapists, psychiatrists and dietitians who all have a common goal: to help kids just like me. Reach out to your friends, ACS, medical doctors, parents or a trusted adult and be amazed by how quickly and effectively you will receive the care you need.

If you are a friend of someone who is dealing with heavy thoughts, please support them with kind words and encourage them to get the help they need. Have an open conversation. It will show that person that they can trust you and even push your friendship to new horizons. Walking on eggshells around someone who is depressed can make that person feel awkward and un cared for. Trust me, they will make it clear if it is not a topic they want to talk about. Try to let them know you will be there for them. Don’t be that friend who says, “I’ll always be there for you,” but cannot pick up at 4 p.m. Do not make promises you can’t keep. It is helpful to be present and let them know you are still there for your friend and they still love and care for you.

They want to know that you feel the same way. To those who are feeling down, this is not to say that you need to reach rock bottom in order to find help. If you are feeling sad and whatever, please ask for help. I encourage you to seek assistance before the demons become unmanageable. And to so many others, living proof that there is support and help, and that you can and will survive this.