Mental Health: One Thing To Never Take For Granted

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Lately, I've been reconnecting with friends I haven't seen in quite a while. Some of them I haven't seen since 2015. After we gave each other a giant hug and a kiss on the cheek, we would sit at the bar to order our go-to drinks (Jack Daniel's with 2-3 rocks here) and immediately dive into each other's lives, catching each other up on everything that's been going on. One question that I kept hearing from my friends during these catch-up sessions is "How was your summer?" I've come to realize that every time this question was asked, I hesitated. I knew how to answer it, but I was always slightly afraid to truthfully answer it.

Where do I begin?

Processing what happened in Orlando.

Figuring out what to do after getting an eviction notice.

Having a bomb go off just a few blocks from me.

Losing the trust I had in a couple of people who were once friends of mine.

And now, seeing Charlotte, one of the cities I grew up in, being put under a state of emergency because of the protests happening right now.

Some people may see this as being dramatic (I'm also known for being bit overdramatic sometimes), but my mental health hasn't been 100% this summer. I've truly realized how much I took my day-to-day, positive state of mind for granted. That dark, unknown thing called depression may have crept up on me a little bit this summer, and I didn't realize how long it would take to get out of that funk.

After accepting the fact that this was happening, I began opening up. I started talking to family first, then some of my close friends that I share everything with. After speaking with them about what was going on in my mind, everything just seemed more manageable. It felt like I could take hold the things that were once spiraling out of control. And by golly, getting that feeling back is freaking great.

So now that my state of mind is in a much better place, what did I get from all of this? I learned how to be open, honest, and vulnerable to those who will never judge me. I now know that it's OK to be a bit more affected from any type of event, whether it's something very personal or something that affects millions of people. And, most importantly, if someone else is going through similar difficult times, I'll make sure to let them know that if they need someone to talk to, I'm here for them.

I hope you do that last part as well.

Daniel Szymczyk is the Founder and CEO of The HIV League, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering the HIV Community through scholarship, wellness, and education. Check them out at www.hivleague.org.

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