

vol. 12

# COMMUNICATION

Mentality  
MAGAZINE

# Mentality

M A G A Z I N E

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**disclaimer:**

Some of our content could be emotionally triggering to those who can relate or have experienced similar struggles. If you find yourself becoming uncomfortable while reading, please take a moment for yourself. If you would like to speak to a professional, resources are listed at the end of our magazine.

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W W W . M E N T A L I T Y

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

“Openly discussing and prioritizing mental health through writing at the University of Michigan.” That is the mission statement of Mentality Magazine, and I thought it a fitting start to our twelfth edition of our print magazine, Communication.

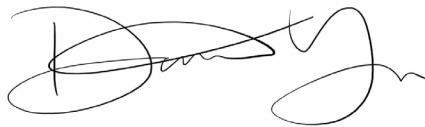
As someone who has made it their goal to study mental health and help others with the knowledge that they have, the importance of communication has always felt stark to me. It allows us to express our thoughts, it gives words to the feelings within our minds and hearts, and it connects us to others who may be feeling the same way. It is what allows us to seek help when we need it, and it is what’s used when others want to support us. Each and every one of the words written by a Mentality writer expresses a piece of their thoughts and feelings as a person, and I’m happy to be able to say that they chose to share that with you.

But the simple expression of thoughts is not always enough. Mentality continues to provide a space for our writers to express their thoughts and in doing so find a community because the conversation isn’t over yet; there are still words left to be said, and ones that haven’t been born yet. The stigma towards mental health still exists, and we’re still working to speak up and speak out against it in whatever way we can. That is why the importance of communication also comes from its continued use. The initial rush of words, the relief of putting a pen to paper—those are important, but so is coming back to that document or revisiting an unfinished conversation.

In this edition, you’ll find our writers’ thoughts on communication: how it appears in their lives, how it appears in society, and even when it goes wrong. My hope is that you approach each of these pieces not only with an open heart and the desire to understand and connect with people who you may have never met before, but also with the understanding that this is another piece of the puzzle, another step forward as we all work to broaden the communication surrounding mental health and share our experiences in the process.

This year marks Mentality’s sixth: six years of stories, music, pictures, discussions, and now twelve print magazines, each of which is underscored by a desire to communicate. Although this is my last year leading and being part of this wonderful organization, I’m immensely proud to see where it has come and am excited to see where Mentality and all those who are a part of it go from here.

Reader, I present to you Volume 12 of Mentality Magazine: Communication. I hope you enjoy it.



Love,  
Diane

TABLE OF

# CONTENTS



**04**

THE TALK OF TODAY

**06**

YOUR PHONE BUZZES

**08**

KATIE'S GUIDE TO COMMUNICATING WITH  
HIGH FUNCTIONING DEPRESSION

**10**

"ATTENTION PASSENGERS"

**12**

STAFF PIECE

**14**

UNREAD GOODBYE

**15**

THE BENEFIT OF NOT BOTTLING UP

**16**

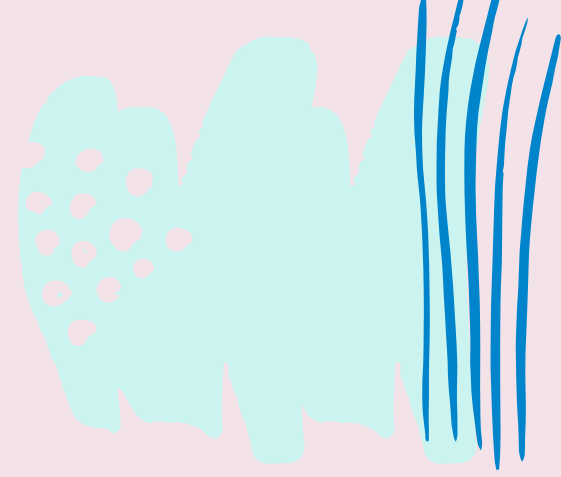
HOW TO HANDLE THE NEGATIVE HIVE MIND

**18**

BATTERED BLUE SNEAKERS

**20**

JUST SAY IT



# The Talk of Today

Written and designed by Paul Silaghi

For most of human history, real time communication has been restricted to verbal discourse. This was revolutionized with the invention of the telephone, and the widespread use of mobile phones in the modern day has fundamentally altered the ways in which we talk to each other. Numerous individuals have added two more modes of communication to their everyday lives: calling and texting. Choosing the medium by which to talk to someone may seem trivial at first, but it affects numerous aspects of the interaction, including the flow of communication, the emotions relayed between individuals, and the lasting impact of the conversation. This final one may be the most important because the effects of a dialogue influence how one proceeds at the conclusion of the interaction, which directly affects one's mental health.

Calling and texting are different from speaking face-to-face in one very notable way: the absence of body language. When you speak to someone directly, you are able to instantaneously view the impact of your words on that person through their non-verbal reactions, which can sometimes be as simple as a shift in expression or seating position. However, much of this is eliminated with calls or texts, and the only major indication of how your words were interpreted is the response received in return. When calling, one's vocal intonations and inflections provide cues regarding the way in which a statement was meant or understood, but this leaves out the aforementioned physical aspect of communication. Furthermore, when texting, emojis can indicate one's intent with a message, but this excludes many of the finer details best captured through in-person interaction. The idea of non-verbal cues is connected to another advantage of in-person communication: its conduciveness to empathy. Being able to witness the listener's reaction creates a sense of responsibility with words on the part of the speaker; for instance, if someone sees that their words are upsetting the individual whom they are speaking to, they can try getting their point across in a more optimistic or reassuring manner. The ability to refine how one delivers their words as a conversation progresses encourages dialogue that is open and honest, yet mindful of how it's affecting those partaking in it. When one is unable to see how their words are influencing those to whom they are speaking, it is less likely that they will give as much consideration to the effects of the exchange. In fact, this is the precise reason that many have attributed to the concerning environment perpetuated in many corners of social media platforms. Social media is not meant to be an equivalent to private, one-on-one communication, since we tend to better know and have a deeper regard for those we interact directly with as compared to those with whom we share a message or two on social media, but the underlying theme that empathy is best fostered through face-to-face connections remains. Empathy in virtual communication is more difficult simply because it is harder to understand how to adjust what you are saying to meet the needs of the person you are talking to. Calling and texting do not come without considerable advantages of their own, however.



Calling and texting have added an entirely new dimension of convenience in communication that has allowed us to stay connected to anyone with a device. This has expanded our communication in many ways, allowing us to reach individuals who we may not have otherwise been able to contact. Furthermore, calling and, especially, texting, give one the ability to insulate themselves from a conversation that is important yet difficult. Despite the previously-described benefits of being able to see how people take in your words, conversations that are frustrating or oppositional may simply be better held at a physical distance. When texting, such difficult conversations also open up the opportunity for both people talking to take time and think about the precise wording they are using to convey their thoughts without the awkwardness of taking longer than expected to reply during conversations held face-to-face or over the phone. This can eliminate some of the misunderstandings or impulse statements associated with communication that requires instantaneous responses.

Ultimately, no one form of communication is inherently “better” than another, but each has critical characteristics that affect our interactions. Communication wields an incredible potential to impact our everyday lives. Even a sour conversation with a stranger can leave one thinking for hours, so when a serious discussion on an important topic with a loved one goes wrong, it could leave one in a mental debacle. On the other hand, an exchange that is beneficial and productive, from light-hearted to life-changing, boosts confidence and self-perception. This helps cultivate a more positive mental state grounded on the idea of mutual respect and honest dialogue between people. So the next time you are thinking about a conversation, I encourage you to consider not only what you want to say, but also how you want to say it, as it can make all the difference.



# your phone buzzes

written and designed by Diane Yu

your phone buzzes

once. twice. you stop counting after the third. you know who it is.

you glance at your phone quickly. you tell yourself that you're only doing it to check what the messages are about, because it's been days, weeks, too long since you've last spoken to each other and if they don't want to reach out when you message, then you shouldn't respond to them so quickly either.

you tell yourself this, and you know you're lying because you've told this lie before.

sure enough, it's a series of texts asking for help. they sound distressed enough that you know they'll be hurt if you ignore them. you respond to their message, help them through their problem. you reassure them that it'll be okay. they sound dubious when they accept your words, as they always do, but in the end, they move on to other worries anyway. you learn about what they've been struggling with since you've last spoken, you send them virtual hugs and words of love, you talk for hours about nothing in particular because that's how it's always been between you two. it's so easy to talk to them, and you're reminded of why you're friends.

you send them one more message.

they don't respond.



oh, you think. and that's the end.

you never said anything about the problems that you've been grappling with. you never mentioned the stress that's been building up bit by bit every day. you never offered it, but also...

they never asked.

you wonder if you should be pushing for more. you wonder if this is unequal, if you should want more than a shoulder to cry on every few months when everything builds up to be too much and you can't handle it anymore. you wonder if you should message them more. you wonder if it's your fault, your responsibility.

the longer you turn this over in your head, the more the silence feels like a dull weight, a bruise that you've never quite let heal. its pain is familiar, though, with how often you press on it, how often you've reached out with the expectation of this exact conclusion. it's a familiar routine, and in a few days, weeks, too long, you'll be pressing on the bruise again to see if it's still there.

this hurts, you acknowledge. the words *my friend is hurting me* are more painful, even in the confines of your mind, but they're true too. but the thing is: you know you can hurt them, by saying so. maybe even more than they're currently hurting you. the fear keeps you trapped, ties the words to your heart and doesn't let them out of your throat. what if you hurt them? what if it hurts them to talk to you, after? what if they don't want to talk to you anymore? what if you two stop being friends? the bruise hurts less than the sharp knife of separation, you think.

you slowly make your peace with the idea. this is okay, isn't it? your friend is happy with this, aren't they? you're doing right by them, aren't you? this is okay. maybe you aren't as happy as you could be, but this is okay. isn't it?

you don't say anything.

two weeks later, your phone buzzes.



# Katie's Guide to Communicating with High-Functioning Depression



Written and Designed by Katie Good

As a University of Michigan student, it often feels like you are meant to do it all. Difficult courses, research opportunities, extensive extracurricular activities, and an extravagant social life aren't choices but instead requirements. Sometimes, this is great! It means seeing friends, feeling smarter, and overall just continuing the creation of oneself as a well-rounded individual. Other times, though, this is overwhelming. It feels like the world is going so fast and you are just sprinting to try and keep up. Add into that struggles with mental health, and you have a recipe for imminent disaster. How do you tell people you need a break when it feels like everything and everyone is racing past you?

I still struggle to work myself out of those overwhelming situations I often find myself in, whether it be backpedaling on plans when I've overscheduled myself, or studying less for an exam to take care of my mental health. However, years of therapy and self-reflection have allowed me to create my own set of survival skills when the going gets a little too tough.

- Set a schedule. For years, I relied on a simple planner to keep track of homework and important dates. However, as my days became busier and my mental health deteriorated, I found myself missing deadlines and flaking out on plans more. While working with my therapist, I discovered the wonders of appointment books and Google Calendar. Instead of having a jumbled checklist of tasks, I was able to plan out my days hourly and gauge how mentally exhausted I may be by the end of the day. I do this by taking a 12-hour planner and creating color-coded blocks to represent times that I have classes, meetings, or other plans throughout the day. The white blocks left on the schedule are where I can take the time to study, eat, or relax. Being able to see how "colorful" or "white" my day will be allows me to mentally prepare myself in the morning for what's to come. This has helped me learn my daily mental and physical limits so that I don't agree to too many plans and overwhelm myself. Even though everyone's idea of being busy is different, being able to visually see and know what busy means to me allows me to be honest with myself and others about my mental energy.
- Have check-ins with those close to you. Even if it is just asking about someone's day on a scale of 1-10, having quick check-ins with those around me has been really helpful when I am mentally struggling. It allows me to take the time to reflect on my day and my mood and then communicate where I'm at without having to fully explain myself. Before making this a habit, my friends and I discussed how we want to be supported when our mood is low so that we can begin to support each other quickly without having to thoroughly communicate our needs or guess the needs of others. Therefore, the utterance of just a number can create the circle of support needed when I am struggling.

- Be honest with your instructors. In my first year of college, I was convinced I needed to be a perfect student that finished all of my assignments weeks before their due date and went the extra mile in everything I did. However, that mindset had me burned out in weeks. As I continued my studies with the additional struggle of the COVID pandemic, I realized that going above and beyond in everything I do just isn't a feasible way to live my life and will just perpetuate my already debilitating depressive symptoms. I started reading the late submission and extension policies for my courses and emailed my professors when I knew that I would be unable to meet certain deadlines. Therefore, instead of missing assignments and feeling like I was being punished for my mental illness, I was able to establish an honest relationship with my professors in which they knew I was working to succeed in their class but that I would just need a little more time on assignments to do so. This allowed me to work on my mental health without the fear of academic consequences while learning how to be honest with my superiors about my capabilities when in a compromised mental state.
- Organize your thoughts through writing. When I find myself overwhelmed with my daily tasks, my feelings of hopelessness are often followed by irritability and rage. This can quickly lead to me lashing out at others for little things I would normally ignore, hurting my relationships. Now, when I feel myself getting angry at even the smallest annoyance, I pull out my phone or my journal and start writing how I feel. Often, these mini rants reveal what the real source of my anger is beyond finding a filled trash can or dirty cup. However, if I find that the cause of my anger continues to be an issue, I am able to write some things down, calm down, and decide on a rational way to have a conversation about the issue with others. Therefore, instead of burning bridges and hurting feelings while I am experiencing a depressive episode, I take the time to reflect, regroup, and reevaluate the root of my emotions.

Dealing with mental illness on a daily basis can be exhausting. I hope that the tricks I've learned to communicate my struggles with mental health can help others feel more comfortable advocating for themselves when living life feels too hard. <3



# "ATTENTION PASSENGERS"

Written by Vibha Moorthy

I was 10 years old, in a neon pink Justice t-shirt on a 9-hour flight to India, when I first heard the standard airplane safety announcement. The flight attendant had just instructed us to put on our own oxygen masks before turning to help others. Buckled in between my parents, I looked up at them confused. *Wasn't helping yourself first a selfish thing to do?* The notion didn't sit right with me for a long time until I got to high school and the answer slapped me in the face.

It was sophomore year, and I remember sitting with my friends in the backseat. They were taking turns venting about their various home troubles. After listening for a while, I chimed in with "Oh no dude, yeah the same thing-," but I was immediately cut short.

"Vibha, you don't get it. Your life is perfect."

I was taken aback.

*Was my friend right? Did I not have legitimate issues?*

I recollected my entire childhood, in a desperate attempt to understand why my friend said that. I grew up with a solid friend group and a great relationship with my parents. So don't get me wrong, I'm grateful, but that didn't mean that there weren't less than perfect days.

Yet hearing my friend say that wracked me with such an intense wave of fear and shame. So what did I do? I shut myself up and started playing the "therapist" for my friends.

I deluded myself into believing that my struggles wouldn't compare to my friends' struggles. I felt so rejected when I tried to express my own pain, so giving other people advice subconsciously allowed me to feel needed. As a result, I ignored my feelings and tried to just be less, so that there was more room for me to help other people with their problems. In a cacophony of teenage worries, I was the megaphone that amplified my friends' issues by drowning out my own. However, conversations that I'd generally looked forward to started draining me and my smiles stopped being genuine. Since my friends thought I had it easy, I felt like that was the only image I could portray. Forget main character energy. I turned into an extra in my own life.

It got to the point where I so badly wanted to feel appreciated that I mistakenly equated being taken advantage of with being a good friend. One of my friends made the decision to come out to me, but became extremely upset at doing so and faulted me for it. Though in reality it wasn't my fault, I was so engulfed in guilt that I felt like I had to do everything in my power to console him. When he frequently called me threatening to commit suicide, I was so panic-stricken that I agreed to do favors for him that I normally wouldn't. He used my guilt as coercion, getting me to call his college friends and act like his angry ex-girlfriend to hide the fact that he was gay. Whenever he told me that he was drunk,

I would anxiously wait for his text at the end of the night to reassure myself that he was still alive. Once my body came down from its high on fear, I'd begin crying uncontrollably. Again, because I didn't want to be a burden to anyone, I would clamp my hand over my mouth as I sobbed so that I wouldn't disturb my roommate. She could tell that there was an obvious crack in my otherwise happy demeanor, but whenever she asked me about it I just shrugged her off. I thought that sacrificing my sleep and feelings to help him was the noble thing to do because at least I was taking care of someone. So even though I was in no stable headspace to listen, I forced myself to help because I believed that it was my duty.

After weeks of sleepless nights and shirking away from my roommates, I realized how emotionally excruciating the situation truly was. It wasn't until I reached out to a CAPS counselor that I realized my desperation to make him happy was both impeding him from getting professional help and making me unhappy. As much as I acted like a therapist for my friends, at the end of the day, that's all it was: a role. When I told my friend that I needed space so I could recover, he lashed out, saying that his coming out was his last-ditch attempt to save our friendship. As tough as that was to hear, I slowly pieced together that he wanted to keep me in his life because of my selflessness. By not communicating how I truly felt, I enabled him to be selfish. At that point, it was abundantly clear that I had let him violate several boundaries in order to make our friendship work.

His outburst let me recognize how many times I'd let other people overstep my boundaries in the past too. As extreme as the situation was, I'm glad I went through it because I understood that just because my experience varied from someone else's, it didn't make it any less valid. I prided myself on my ability to care for people, but oddly enough I didn't think that I deserved the same care. I had gotten so used to my mind telling me that I had to win "the shittiest experience" award before I could express my concerns that I stripped myself of the basic need of connection and empathy. But I had a voice, and I learned that I was allowed to take up space.

It wasn't easy, trying to unlearn all of these qualities that were holding me back. As I redefined my boundaries, people who I considered friends slowly disappeared from my life. It hurt at first, but it forced me to comprehend that self-care is not the same thing as being selfish. And someday, if that oxygen mask ever drops down, I promise myself that I'll grab on without a second thought.

# WHAT DO YOU VALUE THE

## KATIE GOOD

I value two way conversations where each party is really listening. I prefer conversations where I can take the time to really listen to someone, ask questions, and learn more about them much more.

I value honesty the most because it builds trust between people

## PAUL SILAGHI

I think that the combination of honesty and kindness is key to a productive and healthy conversation. .

## ELENA CHAMBERS

## ESHA LAL

I value honesty and openness the most when communicating with others.

# MOST IN COMMUNICATION?

**DIANE YU**

Honesty. I'd rather know that something is wrong and accept that or work towards fixing it than have to second guess myself or the other person constantly.

I value honesty and humor, I think that's what I base most of my friendships on actually. The ability to comfortably share a laugh with someone is an invaluable experience.

**VAISHNAVI KATTA**

**NIKKI CORRUNKER**

I think technology has made communication more accessible. Communication allows us to be closer with people even if we can't be physically close to them.

# Unread Goodbye

Written by: Audrey Safir

Recently, my friend died in a car crash and the last time we talked, he had been struggling with his mental health, including anxiety and depression. I often feel guilty about my career at Michigan. While I have access to boundless opportunities, returning to my hometown feels like pressing play on a paused show. My ambition is praised and lauded as an ideal, but I feel haunted by the people I leave behind, people I know are struggling. When I leave, contact tends to become limited, despite my best intentions. Now, I realize the chances I have missed and will never get back.

My friend never expected anything grand from me. He never pressured me to pursue excellence or saw me only for my accomplishments. He chose to know me as a person. In a world that often forgets this, his death feels like a momentous loss. I remember being angry at him once when he had stood me up. Feeling hurt, I told him to stay away. When we talked again, he plopped into a chair and said, "Yeah, I messed up." Then he apologized for his actions, acknowledging how they had saddened me.

In an environment of intellectuals trying to outsmart emotion or justify poor actions, my friend shone as a unique individual. My friend barely answered his texts, and I know, this time, I can't hope for a response. To say a final goodbye, I decided to send this message.

*Hi. I know you'll never read this, but I wanted to say that I'm glad I got to know you (and your doggies). You were really sweet. I wish telekinesis was a thing so someone could have pulled you out. You would have thought that was so cool. Last summer was hard for me, but it was nice to know I wasn't the only one who could struggle. I guess that's what makes me so sad about this; I never knew if you came out the other side. You deserved that chance. You were thoughtful and kind and gave abnormally strong hugs. I hope wherever you are, there's lots of dogs for you to hug.*



# The Benefit of Not Bottling Up

Written and designed By: Nikki Corrunker

Before college, if you would have asked my friends or family if they knew I needed a therapist, I'm sure they would have told you no. Truth is I barely knew I needed a therapist at the time. I kept it all to myself. I didn't want to bother anyone else with problems that I believed to be all in my head. I was afraid that I would be a burden. This thought process, in truth, has been a really hard mentality to break.

One of the biggest steps to helping me comfortably open up was starting to go to therapy, but that wasn't a magic fix. Even in the beginning of therapy, I used to keep things to myself. It took a while to properly communicate and not bottle things up with my therapist. Willingly sharing my problems with my friends was another story. I would even leave out information in my therapy appointments because I was either embarrassed to talk about it or I didn't think it's important, even if it was something that was bothering me. After a while I realized that my therapist wasn't going to judge what I said, or think what I had to say was embarrassing. Nothing my therapist had ever said or done had led me to believe that she would have reacted in a negative way to what I would say. She was there to help me with whatever I needed, whether that was validating my feelings about something or talking through life changes. It finally clicked to me that I was seeking out therapy, so I should feel comfortable talking about whatever I needed to talk about. Being able to share my experiences and feelings with my friends has helped me a lot. You don't have to share every thought if you don't want to, but it's freeing to know that when you want to share something you aren't being a bother to your friends. I thought I had close friendships before, but being honest with my friends and not hiding key details of my life from them has led to me forming even closer bonds. Since opening up to my friends, I've learned that some of them may deal with really similar situations and problems, and those that haven't, have still been really supportive. I still catch myself mentally telling myself to shut my mouth and stop sharing, so that people don't think I'm a burden, but I've made progress in being able to calm down and trust that my friends care about what I have to say. I have definitely come a long way from where I was.

My family, and friends that knew me before college sometimes seem a little shocked at the progress I've made and what a difference it makes. Sometimes I will bring things up and they say, "well you never told me that," but it's never too late to start being honest. The transition to being more open and honest can feel pretty awkward, almost as if you were lying before. Although any time I have run into this feeling, the recipient has been kind and accepting, even if they may need a moment to process. There's something calming about knowing that my friends still love and respect me despite everything that they know. It feels much more genuine than when I was constantly trying to mentally filter out what I should and shouldn't say to them. Obviously there is a time and place to talk about certain things, but when you're just with your friends you should feel free to talk about whatever you see fit.

# HOW TO HANDLE THE NEGATIVE MIND

WRITTEN BY:  
VAISHNAVI KATTA

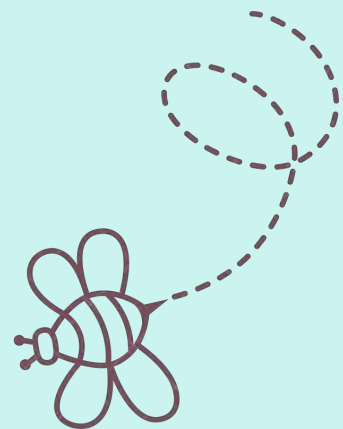
Recently, I've begun to notice how often we're negative about things. Don't get me wrong, venting your problems and expressing yourself is a healthy process. It's just that we've taken it to the extreme. Socially, it feels like it's acceptable to talk about the bad. We're humans and love to commiserate; it makes us feel like we belong. That's why we go around airing our grievances to one another. Commiseration has become an essential part of how we communicate. There's no easier way to start a conversation than mentioning our anxieties about an upcoming test or our frustration with a professor. There's value in this: it takes these burdens off ourselves and allows us to share our negative experiences with other people. The problem is when we only share these negative feelings. This culture of commiseration makes us feel guilty towards sharing the positive.

Think about how often you tell people you're tired or stressed without actually being tired or stressed. I could be having the most amazing day and if someone asked me how it went I'd say "Yeah, just getting through it." Personally, the more I sink into this negativity, the more unconscious it becomes. Soon enough, it feels like I am complaining for the sake of complaining. It's snowing outside? Dang, now my shoes will get wet. We haven't had snow for a week? Well, now everything looks gray and ugly. My first instinct becomes seeing what's wrong instead of seeing what's right. This cycle continues unconsciously, and frankly makes me feel more like a miserable person.

However, it's hard to break away from this point of view because of the guilt associated with expressing positive emotions. For example, I could be perfectly happy with a grade I got on a test, but someone around me is sad that they didn't do well. I'll then feel guilty talking about my success so I keep quiet and nod my head along when they talk about how the test was unfair. In isolation this is okay, but this doesn't just apply to tests. I feel guilty saying I'm not stressed when other people have things on their plate. Our tendency to hide our positive feelings means soon enough, we only hear the negative. Negativity becomes the norm and we default to it. From school to politics to the weather, we find a way to find the negative in everything. When people voice these negative feelings, we agree and internalize these complaints and continue the cycle. At least, that's what I've found myself doing quite a bit and it's caused life to seem seeped with the negative. At the same time, being overly positive only serves to invalidate yours and other people's feelings. There are times when you need to admit that something is wrong or acknowledge a bad day, but this bad day doesn't have to be every day.

One of the hardest things as an individual is breaking away from this pessimistic hive mind. We shouldn't invalidate other people's negative feelings, but personally, the constant stream of negativity has impacted my empathy. I feel like I don't have enough proper energy to listen to my friends' problems when all I've heard all day have been other people's problems. This is truly a problem when I need to employ empathy for situations that deserve it. If I have been exhausting my emotional energy all day by participating in the stream of negative thought, then I won't have enough energy come the end of the day. This makes it harder to take care of my own mental health and support the mental health of others.

It's not all bad though, and part of getting yourself out of the negative stream is recognizing you're in it in the first place. I've been trying to spot this myself and recognize when I am saying things I don't even feel. Ever since I've started keeping track, I've surprised myself by how often this occurs. In addition to that, I've tried expressing my positive feelings more, which helps me acknowledge them and lifts me up. Expressing a little gratitude for good things can go a long way. It gives you the emotional energy needed to carry on with the rest of your day. It also helps you be a source of positivity for those around you. Although it is important to avoid dismissing other people's negative feelings, acknowledging the good and showcasing gratitude for all that around me has helped me handle my emotions in a more productive manner and I am happier because of it.



# *Battered Blue Sneakers*

*Written by: Rida Qureshi*

Blood rushing to my face, my fingernails forming pink crescents on my palms, and his voice reverberating across my eardrums, it was all just too much. My head felt like bricks, I could not bring myself to shift the sore muscles in my neck to look up at him. Cheers began to erupt as I sank deeper into my despair. The faces in the crowd looked like little specks of fairy light, scattered and broken throughout the room.

‘And this year’s spelling bee winner is... drum roll please!’

The entire auditorium shook as everyone pounded the floors.

‘Rida Qureshi!’

The corners of my vision blackened as my knees gave up. I hit the stage with a loud thud, and the auditorium rippled with silence. In that white space between consciousness and nothing, I felt my heart expanding in my chest. Before it exploded, the voices started shrieking,



*You manipulated everyone*

*Fraud.*

*You lied.*

I could not bring myself to look them in the eyes either. As I veered my focus to the floor, I scanned the shiny white surface, but the only trace of anything living were the battered blue sneakers on my own feet. Did the voices not have legs? Puzzled, I let my eyelids fall, feeling the lights burn my skin. I stopped breathing so that I could hear where the voices, which had now become a dull buzz, were coming from. The voices then suddenly stopped, leaving me wrapped in a deafening silence as if they knew I was listening to them. They croaked,

*You can’t escape us.*



I felt a warm drop land in my hair and roll elegantly onto my forehead. I swiped my forehead, groused out at how I could sweat this easily. I could hear my mom's voice in the back of my head,

“Pretty girls gleam. Sweating is manly. And no one likes those kinds of girls”

The back of my palm was smeared with a deep red. Horrified, I looked at the ceiling, which was still infinitely white and tall. The only colors that dirtied my white home were all parts of me. Suddenly, the thought of infecting the entire room with my dirty colors struck me. I wiped the back of my palm against the white floor beneath me. The red streak lit the floor ablaze, illuminating the room with a warm glow. The knot in my stomach loosened as my hair flew with a breeze from underneath. Unclenching my jaw, I massaged my temples which had been aching with a pulsating pain. The corners of my mouth lifted as the room morphed and flipped into a vibrant array of shapes and colors swirling and dancing around each other. The pieces eventually sunk into place in a sweet delicate process. I looked at its final form and she was beautiful.

Her skin had folds and creases that told stories. Each fold hid a part of her she never let anyone see. I walked in circles around her in awe for what seemed like an eternity. Her soft folds began blooming and she was soon fully exposed. She hummed, filling the blank space with meaning. Somehow, that made her even more mesmerizing.

I finally brought myself to look her in the eyes, and a waterfall of familiarity washed over me. Her eyes were mine, her stories were mine, and soon enough, she was me. I felt my voice in my throat, crying to be heard, to be let loose. And so I let it go.

“Thank you.”

Now, I only listen to the voice in my head with the battered blue sneakers.



# JUST SAY IT!

## HOW DIRECT COMMUNICATION BECAME A SOCIAL TABOO

WRITTEN BY ELENA CHAMBERS

“I really want to visit my friend next week.” My coworker said to me, We were sitting in our empty classroom at the tutoring center where we were both employed for the summer. It was an innocuous-sounding statement but after years of dealing with manipulative people, I had a weird feeling that it meant something more. As a midwestern girl who discerned from a young age that being nice should be prioritized above all else, I debated whether I should express my discomfort. “That sounds fun,” I responded cautiously, trying to give her the benefit of the doubt. “Yeah,” she replied, pausing briefly before stating, “I don’t have anyone to cover the class I teach, so I might not be able to go.” There it was. I took a deep breath to calm the panic instinct, something that had become an automatic response to indirect communication after having endured emotional abuse from more than one person over the course of my life. I knew that she was trying to be polite by not asking directly but it didn’t feel polite to me. I didn’t want to volunteer to go out of my way to do hours of extra work when my co-worker wasn’t even willing to face the potential discomfort of asking me to do her a favor. Maybe it was inconsiderate of me, but I refused to allow myself to be coerced into doing something that I didn’t feel comfortable taking on.

“So where does your friend live?” I said, trying to steer the conversation in a different direction. Clearly annoyed that I was refusing to take the hint, she pressed on. “I mean I’m probably not going. I don’t have anyone to cover for me. It’s so sad because I haven’t seen her since before the pandemic.” I was beginning to feel guilty and wondered if it was worth it to deprive her of taking a trip simply because I wanted to be asked directly. My co-worker sighed heavily, “I guess I’ll just have to go another year without seeing her. Because I have to work. And I don’t have anyone to cover for me.” She made eye contact with me, perhaps to judge whether or not I was understanding her hints. I couldn’t take it anymore. Despite my best efforts, I gave in and asked, “Well, do you want me to take over your class for the week?” I saw a brief smile of satisfaction as she said, “Would you? That would be so great, but I don’t want to inconvenience you.” Though I was well aware that she had already inconvenienced me by roping me into her guessing game, I put on a polite smile and said, “It’s no trouble at all.”



Later that evening as I was resentfully preparing the materials I would need to teach her students for the week, I reflected on why I was so upset that she used an indirect approach to communication. Was it my history with emotional abusers? Was it not wanting to volunteer for something that would have been otherwise understood to be a favor? Or perhaps it was simply me not wanting to take on the extra work. Eventually, the uncomfortable truth set in that, while these were all contributing factors, my strong emotional resistance to her communication style was also connected to my own similar methods of avoiding confrontation and rejection. My co-worker wasn't trying to manipulate me any more than I was trying to manipulate her, and yet, both of us were guilty of communicating indirectly instead of asking for what we needed. In her case, she tried to get me to volunteer to cover her teaching shift without actually asking. For my part, I begrudgingly gave into her unintentional coercion rather than politely setting a boundary. I then went home and ranted on the phone to my friend about her supposed "rudeness" when I could have simply told her how I actually felt.

Though I wanted to believe that I would never manipulate someone, I also realized that there were several other cases in my life when I was doing so without realizing. For example, I falsely believed that "I'm kinda busy right now and don't have much spare time" was universal code for "I don't want to go on a date with you" and that standing up and clearing the dishes was universal code for "you should go home now." Furthermore, I believed that I was sending a clear message by attempting to ignore my co-worker's hints when I was actually doing the exact opposite. The big mistake that I was making in these instances was believing (as my co-worker did) that I was being more polite by avoiding direct statements, but this was likely doing nothing but confusing and upsetting the people around me.

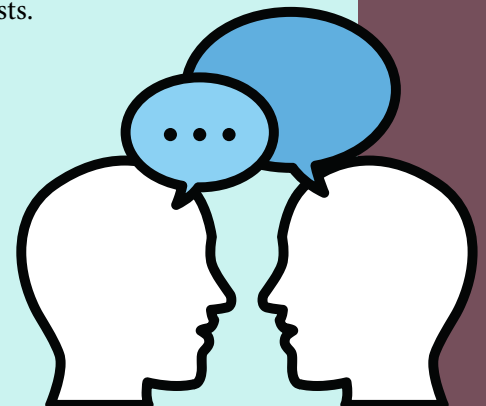
I also realized that my own discomfort with communicating directly may stem from my own internal experience of being on the receiving end of direct communication. While my discomfort doesn't arise when being asked a favor, I have a particular kind of anxiety when faced with direct statements that feel confrontational. In many ways, the social norm of avoiding confrontation at all costs makes it difficult to have honest and open communication, particularly because telling someone that they have said something hurtful is considered by some to be a kind of social taboo. I distinctly remember a time in middle school when my friends and I participated in a game that the other girls in our class were playing that required students to dare one another to do embarrassing or disruptive things during class. Though I was only trying to fit in and had no intention of causing harm to anyone else, my friends and I were asked to have a very direct and very uncomfortable conversation with some of our teachers about the problems with this activity. Despite the opportunity for learning and growth in this situation, the shame, embarrassment, and guilt that I felt overpowered any kind of helpful or constructive realization.



While I much prefer to be asked to do a favor directly, confrontation regarding something that I may have done wrong is still a source of discomfort for me. As much as I hated to admit it, I realized after some reflection that there was a part of me that would rather not be told that I might be doing something harmful. Despite my strong belief in direct communication, it often feels much more comfortable for me to pick up on social cues and change the behavior of my own accord. In a way, my own discomfort with being confronted has translated to the assumption that everyone else will feel similarly in response to a direct rejection or a direct approach to a difficult conversation.

I recently saw a meme that joked about the midwestern practice of signaling to your guest that they should leave through the act of sighing, standing up, and saying “welp....” to which the guest should apparently know to respond, “‘bout time to head out.” While I was initially amused by the joke, a friend who saw the same meme expressed feeling that there were several specific problems with the midwestern expectation of “niceness,” namely that it encouraged people to manipulate rather than communicate. Though many people might not consider asking for something indirectly to be manipulation, the end goal of both manipulation and indirect communication (even without malicious intent) is influencing someone to act in a particular way without actually telling them to do so.

When I think about the practice of “niceness,” it is difficult for me to imagine living in a world in which conventions of politeness didn’t protect me from the discomfort of confrontation. Difficulty accepting criticism is a big part of my perfectionist tendencies because I have developed an unhealthy “all or nothing” mindset in which one small mistake means that I am a bad person and one disagreement means that someone may hate me forever. My theory is that something similar is at work in the widespread discomfort with asking something of another person, particularly because rejection can be one of the most painful experiences for those with childhood attachment wounds or other traumas. As someone who has experienced prolonged sexual and emotional abuse in early adulthood, I have had to unlearn the deeply engrained belief that avoiding confrontation at all costs can “make” someone treat me with respect. In the past, I frequently experienced the abusive behavior of the other person as a rejection because I believed that their actions were a result of my failure to avoid upsetting them. As a result, many people, including myself, may choose not to ask for what they need in order to avoid similar feelings of rejection or abandonment that may come with hearing “no.” Others may avoid a direct question due to feeling uncomfortable themselves with being asked for a favor. Rather than experiencing these discomforts, many people choose an indirect approach in order to get their needs met without facing potential negative outcomes. My hope for the future of healthy communication is that the people-pleasers of the world (myself included) will work on embracing direct questions rather than avoiding hearing “no” at all costs.





# WANT TO GET INVOLVED?



We're always looking for more people to help us!!

**Writers:** All the lovely pieces in these pages were written by students like you! Join Mentality to have your own pieces published on our website or in the next print edition!

**Designers:** Interested in how these pages are formatted and put together? Join our design team!

**Business:** We're constantly looking for ways to partner with other orgs on campus and for new events to participate in!

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS!



# CAMPUS RESOURCES

## STUDENT SERVICES

### **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)**

3100 Michigan Union

Hours: Mon-Thurs: 8am - 7pm, Fri: 8am - 5pm

(734) 764-8312

**(Press 0 for After Hours Urgent Support)**

<https://caps.umich.edu>

Provides free, confidential services for U of M students including: counseling for individuals or couples, workshops and groups for support and changing patterns, Assessment of Substance Abuse Patterns (ASAP), online screening for mental health concerns.

### **MiTALK ("My Talk")**

<https://caps.umich.edu/mitalk>

Offers online screenings for depression and anxiety, skill-building tools, and recorded workshops, lectures and relaxation exercises.

### **Campus Mind Works**

<http://campusmindworks.org>

Provides resources for students who have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder.

### **Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC)**

551 Michigan Union

Hours: Mon-Fri: 9am - 5pm

Office Phone: (734) 764-7771

**24-hour Crisis Line:** (734) 936-3333

<https://sapac.umich.edu>

Provides free confidential crisis intervention, advocacy, and support for survivors of sexual assault, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and stalking.

### **Spectrum Center**

3200 Michigan Union

Hours: Mon-Fri: 9am - 6pm

(734) 763-4186

<https://spectrumcenter.umich.edu>

Provides a range of education and advocacy services that work to make campus a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQA students and staff. Also offers on-campus HIV rapid testing.

### **U-M University Health Service (UHS)**

207 Fletcher St.

Hours: Mon-Wed: 8am-5pm, Thu: 9am-5pm,

Fri: 8am-4:30pm, Sat: 9am-12pm

(734) 764-8320

[www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs](http://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs)

Provides medication and management of common mental health concerns.

### **U-M Psychological Clinic**

500 E. Washington St., Suite 100

(734) 764-3471

<http://mari.umich.edu/psych-clinic/>

Offers assessment, counseling, and treatment for adults in the U-M community, including: anxiety, depression, couples issues, and problems with work and study.

## EMPLOYEE SERVICES

### **U-M Faculty and Staff Assistance Program**

1009 Greene St.

(734) 936-8660

Provides short-term counseling and coaching for staff, faculty and their immediate family members.

## CAMPUS SAFETY

### **Division of Public Safety and Security**

**Emergencies:** Dial 9-1-1

**Non-emergencies:** (734) 763-1131

**Tip line:** (734) 763-9180

## NATIONAL 24-HR HOTLINES

### **National Suicide Prevention Hotline**

1 (800) 273-8255

### **The Trevor Lifeline**

**Trevor Lifeline:** 1 (866) 488-7386

**TrevorChat (available 7 days a week 3pm-9pm ET):**

<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/get-help-now>

**TrevorText (Thursdays and Fridays 4pm-8pm ET):**

Text the word "Trevor" to 1 (202) 304-1200

Provides suicide prevention and crisis intervention to LGBTQ young people ages 13-24.

## **Veterans Crisis Line**

**Hotline:** Call 1 (800) 273-8255 and Press 1

**Online chat:** <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>

**Text:** 838255

Connects Veterans in crisis and their loved ones with qualified, Department of Veterans Affairs responders.

## **U-M HEALTH SYSTEM**

*Note: Services at the U-M Health System are not covered by students' health service fee.*

### **U-M Depression Center**

(734) 936-4400

Dedicated to research, education, and treatment of depressive and bipolar illnesses.

### **U-M Collegiate Sleep Disorder Clinic**

(734) 936-9068

Helps improve your sleep, daytime function and, hopefully, academic performance.

### **U-M Anxiety Disorders Treatment Clinic**

(734) 764-0231

Offers treatment of problematic anxiety and stress.

### **U-M Ambulatory (Outpatient) Psychiatry Services**

1 (800) 525-5188 or (734) 764-0231

Provides comprehensive evaluation and treatment for patients and families affected by mental illness.

### **UM Psychiatric Emergency Services**

**Crisis Line:** (734) 936-5900 or (734) 996-4747

**University Hospital, 1500 East Medical Center Dr.  
Emergency Medicine Reception**

Emergency walk-in consultation and phone service available 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

### **U-M Neuropsychology Clinic**

(734) 763-9259


Performs psychological evaluation to differentiate cognitive functioning.

### **U-M Preventive Cardiology**

(734) 998-7400

Offers a "Power of Relaxation" program, as well as nutrition, weight management, exercise, smoking cessation and stress management programs.

**If you or someone  
you know struggles  
with mental health,  
there are ways  
to get help. Use  
these resources to  
find help for yourself  
or a loved one.**



"I hope that the tricks I've learned to communicate my struggles with mental health can help others feel more comfortable advocating for themselves when living life feels too hard. <3 " - Katie Good (Page 9)