HEALTH

mind matters

MINU BUDHIA

I am an 18-year-old panromantic asexual female who has never been in a relationship because of my unrealistic expectations regarding what or how I want my (male) significant other to be. I developed trust issues over the years and have became choosy about my love interests. The pattern which always seems to repeat itself is this: Whenever I try to give a relationship a chance, I get anxious about the future. If there's a trait I dislike in a potential partner, my anxiety takes over and keeps increasing till I break up, which is usually within a week. How do I get over this? I'm scared to be vulnerable or get too close to someone, and this gets worse once we are 'official'. I'm afraid at this rate, I won't ever be able to be in love with someone. What should I do?

Low self-worth, lack of self-esteem and low self-confidence often lead to overthinking and overanalysing one's relationships. Your being too choosy could be a sign of this as you're eliminating all options instead of reducing them. Also, one of the main reasons behind your anxiety may be self-sabotaging. If you think too much into the future, it allows you to make up hypothetical scenarios in your mind, especially negative ones, and you end up rejecting a potential partner before they have a chance to reject you. Distracting yourself from concentrating on the present potential of a relationship seems to have become a coping mechanism or a defence mechanism.

Most of us are afraid of being vulnerable because we are scared of the potential side-effects, that is, someone may reject us, leave us, or hurt us. However, being vulnerable is part of being alive. Being vulnerable is what allows us to build meaningful relationships because it lays the foundation of trust. And without trust one cannot have a healthy, fulfilling relationship. It is definitely natural and important to want to protect yourself from heartbreak and emotional turmoil, but taking calculated emotional risks is key. Otherwise your life will be spent existing instead of living.

Here are a few active steps to tackle your trust issues:

✦ Create a vision board specifically for your relationship, highlighting positive emotions, especially trust.
✦ Keep a trust journal to log both positive and negative trust experiences.
✦ When you meet someone you like, resist the urge to overshare and let them earn your trust over time.
✦ Before you diagnose a genuine mistake as a betrayal of trust, speak to the person to clarify any misunderstanding.
✦ Speak with a counsellor/ psychologist regarding depression, anxiety and confidence building.

I am a class 12 student and my main question is: How can I overcome loneliness? I have friends who only contact me when they need something, but I can't share my feelings with them. I'm scared of being judged, but I'm also experiencing an immense silence all around me. My friends and family on social media seem so happy. Why can't I be as happy as them? I used to be in love with someone, but it was unrequited. This broke my heart and left me feeling very alone. Negative thoughts are constantly on my mind and I just want to give up. To make things worse, I'm unable to sleep at night, am gaining weight, and also having a hard time concentrating on my studies. When I feel low, I write in my diary, my only companion, but I want a real companion who will stay with me. I want to overcome negativity and be happy. How can I do that?

Self-love is key. And it determines the beginning, the middle, and the end of all our relationships. Our relationship with ourselves is the most important one because it influences every other relationship — friends, family, romantic relationships, work relationships and more. This is something you will have to learn and grow to accept. The first step to combating loneliness is to become your own friend because, at the end of the day, your happiness is in your own hands. And to do this, you have to practise self-kindness through the following:

✦ Reduce any sort of negative talk;
✦ Keep a gratitude/thankfulness journal;
✦ Make healthy food and fitness choices;
✦ Reduce social media usage; and
✦ Visit a counsellor/psychologist for counselling.

Regarding romantic relationships, unlike what most rom-coms would have you believe, you are not a jigsaw puzzle with a missing piece. There is no single 'the one' who will magically make you and your life better. A partner is one who complements us, not completes us. Also, to find a true companion you will first need to figure out what you truly want in a partner. Sit down with a notebook and write down a description of your ideal partner. Then try and divide that into two columns of what you want and what you need. Keep this notebook for over a year and do this exercise every month. This will help you to identify characteristics and traits you really value. Remember, to have a successful relationship the first person you need to fall in love with is yourself.