

Zoe's Anxiety

Zoe grinned as she skipped into her brand new school. Her green dress twirled around her as she put her belongings into her shiny locker. This year Zoe was not in the same school as her friends but she was going to make new friends.

Zoe's new teacher Miss Summers was warm and welcoming. Her contagious smile made Zoe feel calm and excited for the school day.

Miss Summers put the class into small groups and asked everyone to share their favourite thing that they did during the summer.

Zoe put her hand up to go first in her group. She wanted to tell her new classmates all about the waterpark that she went to in the summer with her family. She rode a purple slide with a giant loop in it.

Zoe opened her mouth to share her waterpark story and suddenly her mouth felt like there was sand in it. Zoe's hands were cold and shaky. She felt warm droplets run down her cheeks and her chest felt heavy like an elephant was sitting on it. Zoe excused herself and hurried to the bathroom.

She curled up in the corner on the cold bathroom floor and cried. After a while Zoe went back to class. She sat in the back and did not say anything all day. At lunch she ate her jelly sandwich by herself in the library. Zoe was confused, she did not understand why she got so scared. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

The next day Zoe skipped into school. She was determined to have a good day. Zoe's class had gym in the morning. Miss Summers picked three students to be it in a game of tag.

Everyone in the class was yelling and running around the gym. Shoes squeaked and kids flew by her. Zoe started running but all the noise made her head feel fuzzy. She started to breathe rapidly and her eyes watered. Zoe covered her ears and ran to the door.

Pushing open the door was like lifting a bag of rocks. Zoe sat down on the floor and cried. Miss Summers came over and took Zoe's hand. Miss Summers walked Zoe to the nurses office. The office smelled like new band aids and soap. In the middle of the tiny room was a lady who was wearing a fuzzy sweater with a puppy on it.

The lady introduced herself as Ms. Conner. Ms. Conner gave Zoe a pink pillow to hold and squeeze. She told Zoe to take a deep breath in and hold it for three seconds. Zoe slowly stopped crying and squeezed the pink pillow.

Zoe told Ms. Conner that she felt the same way yesterday. Zoe did not understand what was happening to her body and why she got scared.

Ms. Conner told Zoe that what she felt was called anxiety. Anxiety keeps people safe from danger by making us more alert. Anxiety is an important emotion but sometimes it comes out in times where we are not in danger.

Ms. Conners gave Zoe a list of strategies so that next time she felt anxious she could use the strategies to calm down.

- Take deep breaths
- Take a short walk
- Pretend to blow out candles
- Eat something cold or sour
- Run your hands under water
- Wash your face with cold water
- Imagine your body calming down
- Notice all changes in your body and let it pass
- Tell others how you are feeling
- Ask for a hug
- Close your eyes and imagine a safe place like your bedroom

Zoe put the list in her pocket and went back to class. Later that day she was in art class working on a painting when suddenly her heart started beating like a drum. She started to cry, then suddenly she remembered the list in her pocket. She pulled it out and picked three strategies. She took three deep breaths, then she closed her eyes and pretended that she was at the waterpark with her family. Finally she raised her hand and asked her teacher for a hug.

Afterwards she felt so much better. Zoe went home and told her mom about her day and what she learned from the nurse. Zoe's mom helped her practice the strategies at home.

The rest of the week Zoe used her strategies and enjoyed her classes. On Friday Zoe was playing on the playground with her classmates when she noticed a girl run away from the playground crying. Zoe followed her to a big rock and sat down across from her.

Zoe pulled out her strategies list from her pocket and read them outloud. The girl sniffled and looked up at Zoe. She took a deep breath and told Zoe her name was Brandi. Zoe told Brandi to close her eyes and imagine her favourite place. She told Brandi about the waterpark that she imagined. Zoe invited Brandi back to the playground and together they rejoined the class.

As the days went on Zoe did not need her list as much because she kept her favourite strategies in her memory. Zoe used all the things that she had learned about anxiety to help those around her handle their anxiety too.