

My normal freshman experience of high school was cut short due to the pandemic. I was shoved from a lively school environment to my stuffy house. I'll be short and sweet with how online school was; it was a struggle. I had to keep myself accountable, and I felt isolated from my teachers, peers, and sometimes even my friends. It wasn't easy to concentrate in classes, as staring at a computer screen in my bedroom all day was not an ideal situation. It started affecting my mental health, as I felt more disconnected and hopeless about doing avid work. In other words, I felt stressed and fell into a stagnation. But even though I was going through a hard time, I never shared these thoughts with anyone, as I felt that since I got myself into this mess, I had to get myself out of it.

However, as months progressed, none of my attempts to use my time wisely seemed to work, because I was holding myself up to a high standard that I could not meet right away. That is when I approached my mom, and it felt like a weight was lifted off my shoulders as she began to help dig myself out of my struggles, which I had hidden from her previously. Together, we sought solutions by looking for tutors in subjects I was struggling with and making realistic plans that I could actually achieve. Although everyday was still not perfect, it was a slow process in the right direction. Around this time, at the beginning of sophomore year, my mom and I looked for online programs that I could be a part of, and one of them was the P2P program. I had never tutored anyone besides helping my younger sister with her homework occasionally, so I was a little reluctant on whether I should apply, but in the end, I decided to take the challenge. After sending some documents and doing the interview, I thankfully got accepted and began working with my first buddy, a first grade girl.

As I worked with her during the fall, spring, and summer sessions, I felt more connected to my community, and my confidence grew as I saw my buddy's progress in her English skills grow. As she was learning English from me, I was learning patience and problem solving skills from her. It was a budding friendship that I looked forward to every week, and on days when I wasn't helping her, I got myself engaged with others as well. My friends and I started hanging out in new ways like movie nights on zoom, I met with study groups in cafes outside, and I shared status updates on my mental health with my family more often. As I opened up to more people during that strange time, my academics, relationships, and confidence slowly grew as well.

From this experience, I learned the importance of accepting struggles by surrounding oneself with good people who can help and using that as a turning point towards self improvement. I learned that getting involved in programs and communities is beneficial in so many aspects, because humans are social creatures who thrive by reciprocating help to each other.