It is mental health awareness week, so I felt this would be a good opportunity to share with you one nugget of life strategy that gamification helped me learn.

I have made no secret that I have suffered from anxiety and depression most of my life. These have, at times, crippled me in ways that those without the issues find hard to understand. The truth is that no matter what strategy you may think you have, the first step is always to accept help. Easier said than done, but it is essential. No one should or can go through it alone and come out the other side in one piece.

You can read more about my own journey and battles with mental health on my medium blog here – https://medium.com/deeling-with-depression-and-anxiety

Now, over the years I have had a lot of support from friends and family, with a special shout-out to my amazing wife!

But you also have to have personal strategies to help you day to day, especially with anxiety! Once you are at a point where you can spot the triggers, these strategies can help you mentally avoid them, or work through them. This is where games and my understanding of one aspect of gamification has come in very handy. Problem-solving.

I have written about my approach to problem-solving in the past, but this is a slight addition to my standard method.

Rational vs Irrational

Think of anxiety as an odd conversation in your head. The rational side and the irrational side of your mind in an argument. Anxiety kicks in when the irrational side starts to win the argument, which results in you spiralling towards anxiety. The argument usually involves the irrational side of your mind telling you all the reasons why something is bad.

You could win the lottery and you irrational side would be telling you “This is terrible, you can’t manage that kind of money, it will destroy you. Think of all the people who will try to con you now…” etc.

As the argument continues, you start to get anxious and eventually you cease to be able to function at all. It sucks and it can be very rapid.
Break The Spiral

Once you are able to spot the initial symptoms, you can start to use a problem-solving approach. I present this as a tree-type diagram. In a nutshell, if you can’t affect the problem, move on until you can. If you can affect the problem, break it down (if you can), deal with it and then move on. Small problems can feel massive when you suffer from anxiety, but just talking yourself through some simple steps really can help. You may need to click to enlarge or download the PDF here.
There will be some who read this and say “that’s easy, why all the fuss?” Trust me, this is very, very hard. After admitting there is a problem, the next hardest step is to start to learn how to notice when you are falling into anxiety. Only then can this sort of thing work. I think the modern types refer to this in terms of “Mindfulness”.

There is Help

If you think you need help, or if you know someone who you think does, talk about it. There is help out there.

In the UK start here: https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health/getting-help

In the US try here: https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/finding-help.
Please tell me other country starting points in the comments and I will add them.

You are not alone.

An a bonus video on spotting the signs of Anxiety that I did a while back!

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