

Rafaela's Test

Zara: Don't worry. If you don't pass, it's not the end of the world.

Rafaela: It is for me, Zara. I need to pass this test, so I can go to college.

Zara: Look, I took the High School Equivalency Test once already. I passed the science section, but not the other subjects. If I fail again, I can take it again.

Rafaela: I'm scared of failing.

Zara: We've studied hard in this program. We'll do our best, Rafaela, and we'll be fine.

Doctor: The results are normal. Your lungs sound good, very clear. Are you going through a lot of stress these days?

Rafaela: This morning I was going to take the test for my High School Equivalency diploma, and that's when this happened.

Doctor: That could be it. Tests can sometimes cause a lot of stress and anxiety.

Rafaela: I thought that I was having a heart attack.

Doctor: You weren't having a heart attack. But I think you were having a panic attack. In a panic attack, the body panics in reaction to stress.

Rafaela: Why did it happen to me? It doesn't happen to other people.

Doctor: A lot of people at certain times in their lives get panic attacks.

Rafaela: I don't want that to ever happen again.

Doctor: There are things you can do to manage your



stress, so it doesn't become a panic attack.

Rafaela: What can I do?

Doctor: There's a free New York City program called *NYC Well*. It has a great website with information about things you can do to manage and reduce stress. You can call anytime, day or night, and speak with someone about anything going on in your life. They have trained people – peer counselors who know how to help.

Rafaela: What's a peer counselor?

Doctor: It's someone like yourself who has experienced a anxiety or depression or other difficulties, and who knows how to help you get through difficult times.

Rafaela: Sounds good.

Doctor: You can text or chat too if you don't want to talk. It's free and confidential.

Rafaela: Thank you very much, doctor.

Alicia: Rafaela... Why didn't you go to the food cart today after your test? Your brother was waiting for you.

Rafaela: I am sorry.

Alicia: Martin had to work alone. I had to stay home all day and babysit Isabel. How was your test? Where did you go afterwards?

Rafaela: I am tired. I'm going to bed.

Alicia: Rafaela. We have to go to work. Are you okay?

Rafaela: I'm fine. I'll be there a little later.

Alicia: All right. I'll... I'll go ahead. I'll see you

there?

Rafaela: Okay.

Alicia: When you're done with the tomatoes, can you fill the cooler with ice? *Ay dios mio*. What is wrong? If you're worried about the test, it's over. Stop worrying. You probably did fine. We've got work to do.

Rafaela: You're putting so much pressure on me. Leave me alone.

Zara: Hey?

Rafaela: Hello.

Zara: Your mom let me in. I've been calling but you don't answer. I was getting really worried.

Rafaela: Don't worry.

Zara: Okay. But, tell me, what's going on?

Rafaela: Nothing's going on.

Zara: You weren't at the test.

Rafaela: I had a panic attack.

Zara: A what?

Rafaela: A panic attack. It felt like my heart was going to jump out of my body and I had trouble breathing.

Zara: Why didn't you tell me?

Rafaela: I didn't tell anyone. I went to the emergency room.

Zara: You didn't tell your family?

Rafaela: No. They think I took the test. I don't want to make them worry.

Zara: I think they are worried. I'm worried too.

Rafaela: I'm okay.

Zara: So, you didn't take the test. That's okay. There's always another chance.

Rafaela: I don't want to study anymore. I don't feel like doing anything anymore.

Zara: You sound like you are depressed.

Rafaela: The doctor gave me this. She said that I can call and speak to someone, but I don't want to.

Zara: I think it's important to get help.

Rafaela: I'm okay.

Alicia: She has been in bed for the last couple of days.

Zara: The doctor gave Rafaela a number to call to... to get help managing stress and anxiety - 1-888-NYC-WELL, but, Rafaela said she does not want to call it. She says she can take care of herself.

Alicia: She sounds like me when I was her age.

Rafaela: Hey!

Zara: Oh, *chiquita!*

Alicia: Rafaelita, *mi amor*, I am sorry for getting angry with you, *mija*.

Zara: I told your mom what happened.

Rafaela: It's okay. I know you were trying to help me... Both of you. I am sorry for making you worried.

Zara: So, how are you feeling now? You look good.

Rafaela: I'm feeling much better. Time to get back to work and then to make plans for your college.

Zara: College? I might not have passed my HSE test.

Rafaela: Well, if you didn't pass it, then we will study together. I decided to go back to school. I am not giving up.

Zara: What's going on?

Rafaela: Zara, I don't think I can do this. I can't concentrate. It's too stressful.

Rafaela: Where did you get this?

Zara: From the *NYC Well* website. It's for lowering stress. Let's try it.

Rafaela: Okay. Close your eyes, breathe in and feel your stomach muscles relax. Hold it for a moment. Okay.

Zara: And this one is called "full body relaxation."

Rafaela: Can we take the test lying down?

Zara: Let's do this every day.

Zara: We did it! Let's go celebrate.

Rafaela: Hm. What do you mean? We took the test, but we didn't pass it yet.

Zara: I think you did well. I think we both did well. Let's celebrate.

Rafaela: Even if we passed it, then what do we do?

Zara: I thought you want to go to college?

Rafaela: I don't know.

Martin: When are you going to open the envelope? It's been there all day.

Rafaela: What if I failed?

Martin: You'll take the test again.

Alicia: Come on, dear. You have worked so hard. Whatever happens, you will be okay. Let's open it. ... Well?

Rafaela: I passed.

Alicia: What? I am so proud of you! Now you can go to college. You can do whatever you want in life. This is wonderful!

Martin: It's like she wasn't happy that she passed.

Alicia: I don't know what to do. It is making me very nervous. I... I don't want her to suffer.

Martin: What about the number that Zara told you about?

Alicia: I think she's scared to call them.

Zara: You haven't touched your food.

Rafaela: I'm not hungry.

Zara: Rafi, I don't understand. You worked so hard to prepare for the test, and you don't seem to care that you passed.

Rafaela: I know.

Zara: What about college?

Rafaela: I don't care about college.

Zara: Rafi... I think it would be good to get some help. Speak with a professional, a therapist. What about *NYC Well*? The number the doctor gave you after the panic attack?

Rafaela: I don't think a call can help me.

Zara: But I think it can, Rafi. I called and found out you can speak to someone who is a peer too – someone who has gone through anxiety and depression and who knows how to help you.

Rafaela: Thank you for being so patient and caring so much for me, but I don't think I can talk to a stranger on the phone about my problems.

Zara: Why don't you try? ... I have to go.

Rafaela: Hi. I'm... I'm calling because, um... I haven't been feeling well lately, and... I don't know what to say.

Peer

Counselor: Take your time. I am here to listen.

Rafaela: This is my first time doing this and I'm feeling very uncomfortable.

Peer

Counselor: That's okay. I'm glad that you have called.

Rafaela: Thank you. I have been so nervous about doing this.

Peer

Counselor: Can you tell me what's making you nervous, or anything that's going on in your life?

Rafaela: A lot of things and maybe nothing. I don't know what to do with my life. I worked so hard to pass a test and I passed and my family was so happy for me, but I feel nothing. Numb. I even feel a new kind of pressure. It's so strange.

Peer

Counselor: I understand. There are so many tests in life. Sometimes when you pass one, it just seems like there's a new mountain to climb.

Rafaela: Yeah. Yes. I am calling because I think I am depressed. And it's not the first time. And I feel so bad because I am making my family worry about me. ... And sometimes even the small little things make me anxious, like answering the phone or the doorbell or even talking to people. And I just feel there is no point to do anything.

Peer

Counselor: I understand.

Rafaela: I am not living in my home country. And sometimes I feel I can not belong here. We don't have a lot of money and after my father died, things got more difficult. And some people expect me to have a husband already. And everything is harder because we're not from here. And we don't speak perfect English.

Peer

Counselor: It's really hard, I'm sure. There are thousands of immigrants in New York going through difficult situations like you are talking about, and depression and anxiety are very common.

Rafaela: I didn't think it was so common.

Peer

Counselor: That doesn't make it any easier for you, but it's important to remember, this is not your fault.

Rafaela: I don't want to talk about it to anyone. I don't want to make life difficult for anyone. And I am afraid that people will think I am crazy.

Peer

Counselor: You are not crazy. It's absolutely normal to have periods in life when we feel depressed. It's a natural response to life. Everyone goes through it at some point. But the good news is that we can help you to get better.

Rafaela: Really?

Peer

Counselor: Absolutely. Mental health is just like physical health. We can treat it, and it's nothing to be embarrassed about. It's not our fault if we get the flu, and we don't get embarrassed if we have the flu. So you don't need to feel guilty or embarrassed if you feel depressed.

Rafaela: I never thought about it that way.

Peer

Counselor: If you would like, we can find a service in your community where you can talk with someone regularly to help you feel better. Would you like me to do that for you?

Rafaela: Yes, please. That would be very good. Thank you.

Alicia: I don't know what to do. I am so worried about my daughter. I think she's becoming depressed again. It's so painful to watch her suffer.

Counselor: I understand. Is your daughter getting any professional help?

Alicia: She resists it, and I... I don't know how to help her. I don't want to push her. What do you recommend that I do?

Counselor: Ask your daughter if she would like to talk about her feelings. Be there to listen to her, and when she is ready to get help, be there to help her. Let her know she is not alone.

Alicia: Yes. I will.

Counselor: Do you know if your daughter has any ideas of hurting herself or ending her life? It is not an easy question to ask but it's very important to know if she is in danger.

Alicia: I understand.

Counselor: I know it is difficult to see your daughter like

this. It is very good that you called here. It's important to take care of your own mental health during times like these.

Alicia: How? What can I do? It is so stressful and painful.

Counselor: There are many good ideas on the *NYC Well* website... good for you and for your daughter.

Alicia: I will look there.

Counselor: And, it is good for you to think of something you can do for yourself.

Alicia: I don't know... Maybe... I always wanted to finish school, but I couldn't because I had to help my parents raise my brothers and sisters.

Counselor: Maybe you can continue your education. It's an idea.

Alicia: My daughter just did it. She is an inspiration for me.

Rafaela: *Mami?* Are you okay?

Alicia: I'm okay. I'm okay, my love.

Rafaela: I just spoke with someone at *NYC Well*, and it was very good for me.

Alicia: Rafaela, dear, I am so glad. I have something to tell you too.

Rafaela: It wasn't easy to come back to school, was it?

HSE Student: No, it wasn't.

Rafaela: Everyone has a story to tell. Right *Mami?*

Alicia: That is very true.



Rafaela:

I was an HSE student in this same program. Now, I am in college studying social work. Today, I am here to tell you that you can get there too.

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