



HELPING KIDS DEAL WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

There are some good approaches to take, and some to avoid, that can help us emerge from this with more skills to deal with life's disappointments as they come.

Child psychologist Eleanor Mackey, PhD. Provides parents with tips on how to help kids deal with disappointment.

As schools close, and birthday parties, graduations, sporting events and all other activities grind to a halt for the foreseeable future, millions of children, tweens, teens and young adults are faced with intense disappointment. Many of these events are occasions that have been long dreamt of or anticipated and the seemingly overnight cancellations are more than many kids can handle. It is equally devastating for parents to see their children experience such disappointment, and I have been asked (as well as asked myself), the best ways of helping kids deal with disappointment.

It sounds trite, but this is a unique teaching experience where we have the opportunity to help our children – and ourselves – learn resilience and how to deal with the disappointments in life. There are some good approaches to take, and some to avoid, that can help us emerge from this with more skills to deal with life's disappointments as they come.



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Thing to do when helping kids deal with disappointment

1. The most important thing you can do in this moment is to validate your child's disappointment. Let them know it is normal, healthy and reasonable to feel disappointed. Let them know you feel disappointment on their behalf. Let them talk about it, cry about it or process it in the way that works for them. Some kids cry, others withdraw, others become angry. There is no right or wrong way to experience or express disappointment.

2. Help your child label this emotion using words like, "I know just how deeply disappointed you are and that is making you feel and act very angry/sad. I understand, and it is okay to feel that way. I am so sorry and I hurt with you."

3. Help your child find ways of coping with the disappointment so that they don't get stuck in the emotion and can continue functioning. Say things like, "the disappointment isn't going to away and it will always be sad that you didn't get to do that planned activity. However, we need to make sure we keep going and lifting ourselves up. Let's find something that helps us right now." This acknowledges the feeling and doesn't dismiss it, but also helps encourage them to move forward.

4. Brainstorm ways to help cope. Journal or draw about it, connect with a friend who is also disappointed, plan a distracting activity, do an online meditation or mindfulness exercise together. Distraction and focusing on other things can help ease the pain. Talk about other things you are looking forward to in the future.

Thing not to do when helping kids deal with disappointment

1. It is really important not to minimize the emotion your child is feeling. Don't tell them that other people have it worse or to stop feeling disappointed. Instead say, "I wish it weren't true, but sadly a lot of people around the world are suffering too. You are not alone."

2. Don't punish for or criticize the emotion or your child's response. If your child reacts with anger, since we are all stressed right now, it is easy to respond back with anger. Try to take a step back and realize that the anger is at the situation and disappointment, not with you. Instead of yelling back,

say things like, "I can see how angry you are at this situation. I don't blame you one bit. It is okay to feel angry. I do too. Instead of taking it out on me, can we find another way to get out your anger?"

Teaching kids to understand and experience disappointment, as well as how to continue moving forward despite life's curveballs is a valuable skill they will always have. Let them know that you are there to support them and that you will get through this together.