

Simple coping skills for kids

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Kids typically face many Hardships, Frustrations and Difficulties as they go through different stages of development. Pets pass away. Friends move town. Families move home and kids change schools. Children miss being picked for a team. Teens are left off party invitation lists. How stressful these everyday events are for children will depend on many factors including their own spirit, the support they get from home and their coping skills.

Coping with Hardships, Frustration and Disappointments (HFD's), both big and small is part of growing up. Some kids cope with stressful or difficult situations better than others. They seem to naturally get by. Others need parental input to help them cope with seemingly minor situations.

It's useful to **reflect** on how you cope when life throws you curve balls. Healthy adults develop a series of coping mechanisms to draw on, often instinctively, when they experience stress or some difficulty so that they don't become overwhelmed.

It helps to share your coping mechanisms with children. It's very reassuring for kids to know that adults also experience and overcome difficulty.

Following are 4 broad coping strategies you can develop in your children to help them deal with normal, developmental Hardships, Frustrations and Difficulties (HFD's). These HFD's include: loss, disappointment, change, rejection, failure and conflict.

Strategy 1: Laugh about it

Help your child see a lighter of funny side of a situation.

Have you ever noticed that when there is a major world crisis or tragedy that there is soon a spate of jokes in the public arena about the issue? It didn't take long for September 11 jokes to spread through the Internet. These jokes help people deal with the anxiety caused by the situation. We are less likely to become depressed or feel helpless when we can laugh at a situation.

Humour is a great coping strategy. Encourage kids to stand back and find a funny side to the situation they may be in. I not suggesting that we trivialize situations, rather develop the ability to find some humour and hope in adversity. Humour is a powerful tool for resilience as it heightens feeling of control. It helps kids reframe a situation and gain some perspective.

This strategy requires kids to look for a funny side and not take themselves too seriously.

Strategy 2: Don't let it spoil everything

Help your child to park his or her bad thoughts somewhere

The ability to compartmentalize bad events and keep them from affecting all areas of life is a powerful coping skill. Resilient sports people such as golfer Greg Norman and former cricketer Shane Warne have the ability to segment their lives and prevent disappointment (in the case of Norman) or personal issues (in Warne's case) from impacting on their sporting performance. Somehow they park their HFD's for a time, and they revisit these issues when they choose.

Similarly, kids can be encouraged to park their HFD's for a time so that they can function normally and then revisit them when it suits. For instance, if something negative happens at recess at school they need to make sure that it doesn't spoil their whole day. They need to think about something else when they are in class and revisit their issue later on.

This strategy requires kids to distract themselves, think about something else and focus on the job at hand.

Strategy 3: This is normal

You are not the only person to experience this

It's human nature to think that we are the only ones to experience bad things. But the human condition dictates that this is rarely the case. Everyone has experienced loss, rejection, disappointment and conflict in their lives. Rarely is there a situation so unique that you are the ONLY Person to have experienced it. ***Normalising a situation is an aspect of optimism.*** When you realise that others also experience similar difficulties and survived you feel more hopeful.

Help kids to normalise a situation rather than personalise it. *"You are not the only one to experience this"* is a powerful concept for kids to grasp. It helps them understand that 'this too will pass'.

This strategy requires kids to rationalize their thoughts and not take matters personally.

Strategy 4: See the silver lining

Help a child to look on the bright side of any situation.

Optimistic people are able to find positive aspects in negative situations, no matter how small. This encourages people to feel like they have some control over situations and is the beginning of experiencing hope.

Help kids see some of life's minor hardships as learning experiences. I am not suggesting you want bad things to happen. You wish they didn't happen but make the best of things when they do. Here are a few positive spins that you can find in most HFD's:

- **Learning something to prevent it happening next time:**
"You may have been unsuccessful this time but you know what to do next time."
- **Positive spin-off:**
"It may have been a boring party but you did meet a new friend, which is great."
- **Learning about yourself:**
"Maybe football, rather than cricket, is more your bag."
- **It's just this! Avoidance of something more unpleasant:**
"You may have wrecked your skateboard but at least you didn't get hurt and end up in hospital."

This strategy requires kids to change their way of thinking and consciously look for a positive aspect.

These are samples of the many different coping strategies that adults can help kids develop, that will help them handle some of life's smaller and larger difficulties.