

Helping Kids to Manage Disappointment

In the past year, many people have missed regular day-to-day activities as they have managed their lives amid ongoing restrictions related to the pandemic. While adults have plenty of experience processing such challenges, kids may have trouble managing intense emotions related to perceived losses.

Dr. Madeline Levine, author of *“Ready or Not: Preparing Our Kids to Thrive in an Uncertain World,”* states that “we need to be incredibly compassionate” as we help our kids through emotional challenges. Letdowns will vary from child to child, as does their ability to cope with them, but experts in child development agree that the following basic tools for managing disappointment are much the same across age groups:

1. *Listen and Validate:* Listen to and acknowledge children’s frustration. Meet them where they are and avoid judging their reactions. Validating the pain they feel will help them process bigger feelings. Emphasize that you hear your child, express your support, and reassure them as the situation warrants.
2. *Provide Perspective:* Helping children understand that most difficult circumstances will pass can help them handle uncertainty. Consider sharing your own experiences of change and uncertainty, including how you dealt with those challenges and what the results were.
3. *Seek Solutions:* Try finding creative solutions to compensate for losses. Though you may not be able to change the facts that cause a specific disappointment, aim to find an alternative that may ease the pain.
4. *Provide a Sense of Control:* Model coping behavior by sharing with your child what your coping skills are, and help them come up with some of their own. Having a sense of purpose and valuing your children’s ideas can make disappointing situations easier for children to bear.
5. *Have Faith in Them:* Learning to live with disappointment is a fact of life. Remind children of things they have tolerated before, and reinforce that although situations are different, they can use some of the same coping skills to get through it.

The message that parents most want to convey to their children is, “I think you can handle this. I know it’s hard but you got this,” says Dr. Levine. Strengthening the muscle of tolerance around disappointment is essential for mental health.

Source: Parenting Challenges, Christina Frank.