

LEARNING TO COPE WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

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As we begin to emerge from the profound effects of COVID-19, one challenge faced by many of us is how to handle disappointment. Whether related to cancelled events, the rescheduling of important medical appointments, or the loss of access to our loved ones, disappointment is a very real emotion.

As defined in the dictionary, disappointment is “the sadness or displeasure caused by the nonfulfillment of one’s hopes or expectations.”

HOW DO WE LEARN TO COPE WITH DISAPPOINTMENT? HERE ARE SIX IMPORTANT STRATEGIES WE CAN USE:

1 ACCEPT THAT DISAPPOINTMENT HURTS

We tend to minimize or try to explain away the fact that we are upset. This results in shaming ourselves or degrading our feelings as illegitimate or unnecessary. We do not need to spend days lost in the pain of disappointment; however, it is important to recognize that our feelings are valid. When we allow ourselves to experience our true emotions, we gain an increased ability to see them as just feelings, rather than something we should avoid.



2 ACKNOWLEDGE THE GROWTH THAT CAN OCCUR

We may experience disappointment when we take a risk, such as seeking out a new friendship, pursuing a job promotion, getting on a transplant list, or speaking up in a demanding situation. We take the risk, knowing that the ensuing events may not go the way we want or anticipate. And while growth can hurt, many of life’s richest rewards come when we take chances and push our own boundaries. So, while the pain of disappointment is real, we can take joy and satisfaction in knowing we tried something new!



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3 BE AWARE OF HOW WE TALK TO OURSELVES

Often, when things do not go as we had planned, we tend to catastrophize or think in “all-or-nothing” ways. For example, rather than saying, “I didn’t get that job and now I will never get a new job,” we can instead say, “This didn’t go the way I had hoped, and it really hurts, but there are other jobs that I can pursue.” The messages we deliver to ourselves have a tremendous impact on the risks we are willing to take.



4 REMEMBER WHAT YOU DO HAVE

Often, when we do not get what we had anticipated, we focus on the negative impact of the disappointment and give too much of our emotional energy to the loss. An antidote to this is the willingness to take inventory of all the good things in our life. As we begin to take notice of the friends, family, resources, and health that we have, we can begin to place disappointments in their appropriate place.

5 TALK TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST

Feelings of disappointment can shade the perception of events. When we speak with others and are open to their feedback, we may realize that circumstances are not as bleak as we originally thought. The key here is to be willing to listen to what trusted friends have to say and not harden ourselves with negative messaging we have going on inside. Going through a trying time is easier when we include those who love and care about us!



6 EXAMINE WHAT HAPPENED

Sometimes disappointments can be prevented by being proactive. For example, a follow-up phone call or email to confirm an appointment might help avoid a cancellation. A more difficult step might require examining the nature of a friendship you have with someone who routinely cancels plans or lets you down in other ways. While it may be hard to consider saying good-bye to someone you consider a friend, you get to decide whether the relationship is worthy of your investment of time, energy, and emotional health.

The pain of disappointment is real. Disappointments are a fact of life, though we may be able to lessen their impact on our emotions. It is not wrong to feel disappointment. However, we can also seek out growth opportunities, cut ourselves some slack, be careful about how we speak to ourselves, involve trusted friends, utilize the good we have in our life, and move toward the next challenge!



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