

How to Help Teens Cope with Rejection, Including the Dreaded College Rejection Letter

Rejection is inevitable, but teens dealing with it for the first time can have trouble coping. Here's how you can help them.

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Rejection comes in many forms during the teen years. Adolescents experience rejections like getting cut from a team, losing the lead role in a play to another actor, or rejection letters from colleges. These rejections can feel huge and life-altering in the moment, but adolescents also experience a wide variety of micro-rejections on any given day. Micro-rejections might include being snubbed by a friend at lunch, a peer saying no to a date, or feeling left out when perusing social media.

No matter the size of the rejection, one truth stays the same: rejection hurts. It feels like the opposite of being accepted, valued, and appreciated. In the minds of teens, rejection feels life-altering. In the case of the dreaded college rejection letter, for example, a teen might feel like the hard work of high school was wasted effort and their goals for the future can no longer be achieved. It is easy for an adult to assess the situation as a minor hindrance, just another part of life to get over and move on from. An adult might view the teen's extreme reaction to rejection as distorted thinking, but for the teen attempting to cope with rejection, the emotional pain is very real.

While some teens go to great lengths to avoid rejection by way of playing it safe, staying within the boundaries of what they know they can achieve, and steering clear of anything considered a risk, the truth is that rejection can't be

avoided. Rejection is an uncomfortable part of life that all teens need to learn to cope with and work through as they prepare for adulthood.

Coping with rejection involves working through two very important components: What you feel, and what you think. These two things often exist in a cyclical relationship in that your feelings can affect your thoughts, and your thoughts can, in turn, affect your feelings. Ignoring either one (or both) won't reduce the sting of rejection but separating them and targeting each one will help reduce negative emotional responses to rejection.

The good news is that you can help your child navigate their struggle of coping with rejection. Try these tips to help your teen work through their complex feelings:

Acknowledge It

While dismissing or downplaying the rejection might feel right to a parent on a mission to protect a teen from emotional pain, it can actually intensify the pain. Rejection feels isolating and lousy, and teens already know this. What they need is empathy, understanding, and someone who will listen. They don't need to be told that their pain doesn't really matter, when to them it feels like the only thing that matters.

So here's what you need to do: name it. Talk about the specifics of the rejection and encourage your teen to label the many feelings overwhelming their mind in response to the rejection. Labeling emotions is the first step toward working through them and moving beyond them. If your teen is unable (or unwilling) to take this step, label what you're seeing. "Your girlfriend broke up with you and you're probably feeling rejected, overwhelmed, sad, and even angry. All of these feelings are perfectly normal reactions to this." Helping your child understand what emotions they are feeling and why, specifically, they are feeling them, will help them cope with all sorts of situation, not just rejection.

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Remain Objective

You might be tempted to yell out all of the reasons that your teen should have been accepted to that college from which they received a rejection letter or why your teen's ex-girlfriend is making a huge mistake by breaking up, but responding in anger will only intensify your teen's negative emotional response. Teens look to their parents for cues when they're under stress. It's essential to remain calm and objective in the face of rejection to show your teen that your love is unconditional and this rejection won't actually ruin their life. Remember, your teen will pick up on the behavior that you demonstrate. To demonstrate anger at every rejection encourages a sense of entitlement and it will make coping with inevitable rejections all the more difficult.

Connect

This is the time to convey empathy and understanding. Admitting that you don't know exactly how your teen is feeling right this very moment but that you do know what it feels like to face rejection opens the door to conversation. Teens don't necessarily want step-by-step instructions on ways to recover from a rejection, but they do want to connect and talk through it.

Leaning on past experiences and sharing your painful memories of rejection as a teen can bridge the gap between you and your teen. While your experiences are not exactly the same as your teen's, you can use them to talk

about how you felt, how you responded, and what you did to recover.

Examine the Thought Process

When teens are stuck in a negative thought cycle, they can develop negative core beliefs. This can lead to decreased self-esteem and future risk aversion. In essence, when teens feel like they can't succeed, they avoid trying.

Explain to your teen that we all have a negative inner critic that drives our thoughts at times. The inner critic isn't the problem; it's what we choose to do with those critical thoughts that matter. Share a few thoughts that run through your mind when your inner critic is loud. Talk about how you feel as a result of those thoughts. Finally, share ways you reframe those negative thoughts to refocus on positive thinking.

Helping teens learn to accept their negative emotions, state their negative thoughts, and reframe their thinking gives them the tools to cope with future rejection and other stressful events. When we normalize the process, teens internalize these skills and are better able to use them when rejection occurs.

Rejection is inevitable, even if you, as a parent, try to avoid it for your child. Your child will face rejection, but if you help them by using these tools, and instilling them with their own [coping mechanisms](#), they will be able to move on from rejection.

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