

Helping Children Handle Disappointment

Missing a friend's birthday party, losing a game, not getting to play with blocks—young children may face many minor disappointments. Parents and teachers would like children's days to be filled with positive and successful experiences, but daily life has both ups and downs. Helping children handle disappointments can provide them with lifelong coping skills.

Acknowledge children's feelings, but focus on the positive.

- Encourage children to put disappointment into words: "You're crying. Are you disappointed about being too sick to go to Miguel's party?"
- If a child is sad or angry when he doesn't receive a present he wished for, acknowledge his point of view, but remain upbeat: "You seem disappointed about not getting a new basketball from Uncle Todd for your birthday. But your uncle picked out a snazzy soccer ball for you. Maybe you two can try it out at the park tomorrow. Did you know that he was on the soccer team in high school?"

Help your child put things in perspective.

- Try not to overreact to children's small frustrations. When you help a child see that missing a chance to play in the block area is not a tragedy, for example, you enable him to accept that waiting for things we want is part of life: "The blocks will still be here in the morning. You can have a turn then."
- Show children that they are not the only ones who sometimes feel disappointed: "This kind of thing happens to everybody once in a while."
- Help children understand that some expectations may not be realistic: "There just wasn't enough time to make a painting plus build with blocks. It's frustrating. But you painted today, and tomorrow you can choose blocks."
- Remind children that minor disappointments won't last forever: "Let me know when you feel better about waiting till tomorrow. Then we can make a snack together."
- Show children how and when to express strong emotions about big disappointments: "You're wishing Mom had called today, but the soldiers don't get to call home right now. You can show your sad, angry feelings by crying or drawing pictures. But I can't let you yell at the dog."

Show your confidence, love, and support.

- Continue to offer affection to the child: "Would a hug help you right now?"
- Tell children that you are confident that they can handle disappointment: "It's hard to miss Miguel's party, but I bet you'll think of ways to wish him happy birthday."

Encourage children to think of coping strategies.

- To help children manage disappointments, remind them how they coped with similar situations: "Once when Josh couldn't play, you invited Rashad to come over." "Last time Mom couldn't call, you felt better after we made her a care package."
- Point out when a child handles a disappointment well: "I know it's hard to be sick at home while your friends play outside! But you are making the best of it by learning new games to play in bed."

For related Web resources, see "Helping Children Handle Disappointment" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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