

FACT SHEET • SECONDARY

Helping Your Young Person Cope With Setbacks

A poor mock result, being dropped from a team, or not getting into a friendship group can feel, in the adolescent brain, every bit as serious as an adult crisis, because a still-developing sense of perspective hasn't caught up with the intensity of the feeling. Rushing to fix it or minimise it both miss what's needed. Here's how to help them recover and learn from a setback rather than be defined by it.



TIP 1

Let them feel it first

Before any advice, just sit with how disappointed they are. Jumping straight to "never mind, there'll be other chances" can feel like their feelings are being brushed aside.

TIP 2

Separate the result from their worth

A rejected college application says something about that one application, not about them as a person. Say this plainly, more than once, because they won't quite believe it the first time.

TIP 3

Ask what's actually in their control

Once the disappointment has settled, gently help them pick out the one or two things they could genuinely do differently next time, rather than a long list of regrets.

TIP 4

Share a setback of your own

At a strategic time, tell them about something that didn't go your way and what happened afterwards. It shows a setback is something you survive and move past, not something that defines you.

TIP 5

Watch how long the low lasts

A few flat days after a real disappointment is normal. If a low mood settles in for weeks rather than days, it's worth a conversation with somebody outside the family in order to seek extra support.