

How To Cope With Life

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•ANXIETY•

Worrying what people think.

- Don't. It doesn't help. And remember, everybody has things about themselves they don't like.

Being nervous about doing something.

- Try it anyway. A lot of things get easier with practice. Think back on first grade and how hard it was to print—now it's a snap. The same can be true for swimming, talking to groups, going to tryouts or auditions, asking someone out, even being rejected.



Upsetting situations.

- Think about whether you are seeing the problem fairly. Try Out another person's point of view and figure out how that person would feel in the same situation.
- Talk things out with a good friend.
- Put your feelings in writing, in a letter or your diary. (If you don't have one, get one. Write in it whenever you have something to say.)
- Do something physical, like jog. Or try some relaxation exercises.
- If you've tried hard to cope and still can't, get help in thinking it through. Sometimes, getting out of the situation is the best solution. Big exception: Your family. It will always be important for you to come to terms with your family.

•FRIENDS•

Pressure from friends to drink or do drugs.

- Let your friends know you're not into drinking and drugs—tell them one at a time so you're not taking on a whole crowd. Your true friends will go along with your decision. (And you may give them the courage to say no, too.)



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- When this won't work, try: "I don't feel like it now," "The junk makes me sick," "That stuff makes me stupid," and "I can't get high—I REALLY want to pass this test so I have to study." The trick is to state your personal feelings; if your friends feel like you're putting them down, they may think they have to put you down, too, and give YOU a hard time.
- Stick to your guns. Some people will give you a hard time about your choices. Let them. The consequences of going along could be harder to deal with than saying no.

Pressure about sex.

- Remember that having sex won't turn you into a man or woman. But it might make you pregnant, or give you V.D. or AIDS — even if you do it just once. So consider the risks and be responsible.
- Remember - some kids tell you they've done it — when they really haven't.
- Having sex when you don't want to will only make you feel bad.
- Don't confuse your desire to please your friend with what is comfortable and right for you.
- Good relationships — friendships and romances - should make you feel good about yourself and your life. Nobody needs any other kind.

•School•

Bad grades.

- What matters is that you try.
- Ask your teacher for help, and keep asking. Teachers like to work one-to-one.
- If you do poorly on a test, ask the teacher whether you can work something out—like maybe an extra project for extra credit.



Daydreaming, difficulty concentrating.

- Consider possible physical causes. Are you sleeping enough? Eating good breakfasts? A balanced diet? If not, take care of the situation.

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- Is something really bothering you? If so, get help from someone you feel comfortable talking to. Try your parents, relatives, a teacher, a coach, a counselor, a friend's parent.

Falling behind.

Remember, this doesn't mean you are bad or stupid.

- Try to figure out what the problem is. Is the class too advanced? Did you neglect your homework? Is it something that's going on outside of school? Talk to your parents or teacher to come up with a solution.
- Stay in School. Your education is your future — it deserves everyone's best effort — so keep looking for help if you're having a problem.



•MISTAKES•

Running Away.

You may think: I'll get my own place and stay out all night, pick my friends and wear what I want. But that gets old fast. Until you finish high school, it will be hard to get a job that will pay for an apartment, food, clothes and partying. Your "own place" may be a park bench, and dinner may be scraps out of other people's trash. Stealing — a big temptation when you're hungry — could land you in jail. Many kids ARE forced to sell their bodies just to get money for food. And prostitution can leave a person sick, pregnant or DEAD.

So before you leave home, try to solve your problems another way. Get help. If, after speaking with someone, you decide you cannot stay at home, make sure you have a SAFE place to go before you leave. Any of the free national hotlines can help you find one.

Drinking and drugs.

If you think they'll help you deal with what's bothering you, think again. They may take away the pain while you're high, but your problems will be worse when you crash. Plus, you may have a new one — drugs or alcohol. If you are drinking or taking drugs and can't stop, it's time to get help.

Call a drug hotline. Or call Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous in your hometown.

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Suicide.

Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. You'll never know whether it makes you feel better or not. You won't know whether the people you love cry at your funeral — or resent you bitterly for making them so miserable. If you bungle your attempt, you could end up crippled for life, with all the problems you had before.

Before you hurt yourself, get help. Call a hotline or suicide prevention center.

•PARENTS•

Parents who don't understand.

- Get them the help of an expert — you. Nobody knows you as well as you do. So if you don't let them know how you feel, loud and clear, who will?
- If they never seem to have time, make an appointment. Find a book, a song or a movie that says how you feel and give it to them.
- Write them a letter. (How often do you do this? They'll automatically think it's a big deal.)

Parents who nag or criticize.

- Ask for details. (Pretend you are a neutral visitor from another planet doing a study.) This gives you time to think. And in the mean time your critic may change his mind. Agree with the criticism and he may even take it back.
- Show that you've listened and understood by repeating what they said. Parents want to know they haven't been talking to air.
- Keep your parents on your side by showing love, appreciation, and interest in them and being as pleasant to them as you want them to be to you.
- Get them to talk about what they did as teenagers — this may remind them of how it felt.

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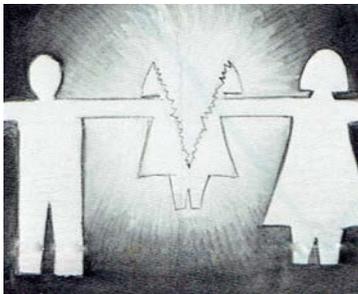
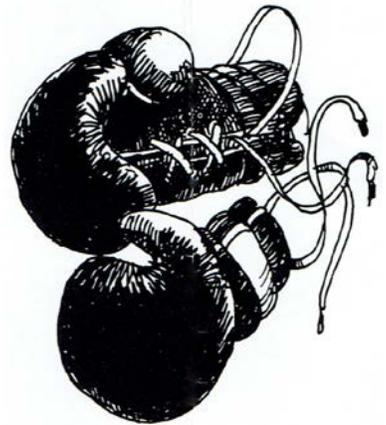
where you hang out.

Parents who are overprotective.

- Parents usually make rules because they love you and don't want you to get hurt. Show them that you understand the dangers they fear.
- Think up rules you think are fairer than theirs. Ask your parents to try your rules.
- Keep them up on your life. Let them meet your friends and see where you hang out.
- Get a friend's parents to talk to them (casually).
- "Everyone else is allowed," "It's my life," "Times have changed." These didn't work for your parents, and they won't work for you.
- Write a protest letter. Let them know you are thinking about how they feel, and then spell out your own point of view.

Parents who fight.

- Tell them it bothers you (but not during a fight).
- Get a family friend or relative to step in.
- Try to understand each one's point of view, but don't take sides.
- Go for a walk, phone a friend or do something else to help you through their fight.



Divorce.

- Keep in mind that it's not your fault in any way. It's their relationship that has fallen apart.
- You can't keep it from happening. And thinking like that will only make you feel worse.
- Look at one bright side: You won't have to deal with the fights.

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- Don't let one parent put down the other in front of you. Remind them that you don't have to hate one to love the other — it's their divorce, not yours.
- Tell the parent you visit that you want to see them. Often.
- Focus on your own life. Keep busy.

A parent's remarriage.

- Let your stepparent spend time with your parent. They are in love and need time alone together. Let them know you understand and don't force your parent to choose between you and a new spouse. Both will be grateful — and warmer to you as a result.
- If you feel left out, talk to your parent and find a compromise.
- Do something nice for your stepparent, to break the ice.
- Try to see your stepparent the way you do your friends' parents — someone you might talk to about situations that are too hot for you own mom or dad to handle. You might as well, because you're not going to make your stepparent disappear.

A parent's problem with drugs or alcohol.

- Push your parent to get help.
- Don't go it alone. Ask an adult you trust to step in. Call Alateen, a group for other kids in the same boat, or Alanon which has groups for families of people with drinking problems.
- Don't let him/her blame you for the problem. There's NO WAY it's your fault.
- Your parent's mood swings are a result of their illness. It's got nothing to do with you.



A parent who abuses you physically or sexually.

- Tell someone right away — an adult you trust. If they don't help, tell someone else until you get help.
- Call the Child Abuse Hotline - the call is free (1-800-422-4453).

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- Remember that no parent, stepparent, relative or friend of the family has the right to abuse you — either physically or sexually.
- You are not to blame when someone abuses you. Their behavior is wrong, and not related to anything you did. Don't feel badly for protecting yourself.

Useful Tactics.

Being young does put you low on the totem pole of power—but you are not helpless. Try these tactics to handle tough situations with friends, teachers and even your parents:

1. Use your head to figure out what the other person is thinking. Then you can talk in a way that person will understand.
2. Stick to facts and say how YOU FEEL about them, as unemotionally as possible. Don't name-call.
3. Don't accuse or criticize the other guy. That will force him to stick up for himself — and pick on you again. 4. Practice what you want to say with another friend. This will help you anticipate comments and figure out answers.
5. Take a problem-solving attitude. Think solution, not victory. It doesn't help to win the argument if you still have the problem.