

Endurance

Patience, stamina, strength in adversity and suffering

"If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant; if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome."

Anne Bradstreet

In a test to check the effects of depression and stress, two groups of mice were given a series of electric shocks. One group was allowed to learn a way to turn off the shocks; the other group wasn't allowed any control over the shocks. The result of the test was that the second group was less able to fight off cancer cells.

When you have no control over the things that happen to you, you sometimes feel helpless, frustrated, depressed, guilty, or anxious. And your body doesn't like it. You often catch a cold because your immune system gets tired, overworked, and goes on vacation, leaving you with a headache and a box of tissues.

Bad things happen to good people. In fact, bad things just happen. Sometimes you have problems you cause to happen because of poor choices, such as not getting enough sleep or exercise, getting chilled, and not eating right. Then you really can't blame your immune system. But some things happen that you can't seem to control.

Endurance is *the ability to withstand hardship or adversity*. To endure means *to undergo hardship without giving in; to remain firm under suffering or misfortune without yielding*. When you have endurance, you stand strong, holding your balance physically, emotionally, and spiritually, without

buckling under, losing hope, or surrendering. You're patient, holding your own and waiting until the turmoil subsides. You know and accept that bad things happen, and you don't blame anyone. Instead of thinking "My mom's in the hospital and it's the doctor's fault," you think "Okay, my mom's in the hospital. Now what do I need to do?"

"The thought that we are enduring the unendurable is one of the things that keep us going."

Molly Haskell

Coping When Bad Things Happen

A zit blossoms on your forehead just before a first date. Or you miss the tying foul shot in the regional basketball playoffs. Or your friend spreads lies about you. Or your dad loses his job. Or you break a leg, catch pneumonia, or develop a serious illness. What do you do? If you have endurance, you cope in healthy, positive ways. You realize that making good choices can help you to avoid much suffering, but you also understand that doing things right doesn't always prevent misfortune from knocking at your door.

Not-So-Cool Ways to Cope

Escape or avoid your problems. You crumple up your failed biology test and toss it in the trash. Or you vegetate in front of the TV, sleep more than you

need to (although sometimes sleeping helps), eat constantly, or do something self-destructive (drive too fast, use alcohol or drugs, or take other unhealthy risks). Sometimes, when things get *really* bad, some people think that suicide is the answer. It isn't. Suicide is the final copout. You can't ever change your mind or come back from it.

"Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem."

Phil Donahue

CHECK IT OUT



Straight Talk About Anxiety and Depression by Michael Maloney and Rachel Kranz (New York: Dell, 1993). Case studies, self-corrective behavior, suggestions for coping, and how to get help. Ages 11–18.

The Power to Prevent Suicide: A Guide for Teens Helping Teens by Richard E. Nelson, Ph.D., and Judith C. Galas (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1994). Understanding the causes of suicide, recognizing the signs, and reaching out to save a life. Ages 11 & up.

Covenant House Nineline

1-800-999-9999

<http://www.covenanthouse.org>

Immediate crisis intervention, support, and referrals for runaways and abandoned youth, and those who are suicidal or in crisis. Help is available for children, teens, and adults.

Self-Help Suicide Resources

<http://www.cmhc.com/guides/suicidal.htm>

An extensive collection of links compiled by Mental Health Net.

Blame yourself. This is *not* the same as accepting responsibility for your actions and choices. In fact, blaming yourself is a way of *avoiding* responsibility. If you tell yourself "I failed my biology test because I'm too stupid to learn that stuff," you've just given yourself an excuse for not studying anymore. And you can forget about doing better on future biology tests.

Blame other people. "I failed my biology test because Sarah made me go to a concert with her." You can probably see the false reasoning in this argument. Unless Sarah tied you up and dragged you to the concert, you *chose* to go with her.

Blame chance. "I failed my biology test because the bus came too early, and I missed it. I got to school ten minutes late and had to rush through the test." Chance happenings are totally out of our control, right? Yes . . . but what we do in response is up to us.

Blame other things, forces, or powers. "I failed my biology test because I had to go to work and didn't have time to study." That's not a good reason. That's poor planning. "I failed the test because God is punishing me." It may help to talk to a religious leader if you feel this way.

Cool Ways to Cope

Face and accept what happens in your life. If you stop trying to escape and avoid disagreeable or painful events, if you stop looking for someone or something to blame, you can gather your strength and move forward. It's normal to feel depressed and discouraged at times. But if you're always angry, hurt, sad, or frightened, you get stuck and immobilized. And you may develop unpleasant side effects—headaches, back pain, overwhelming tiredness or lethargy. Even when what happens to you isn't your fault at all—if, for example, you contract a serious disease—you can't waste your energies wondering "Why me?" That won't make you better. It might even make you worse. Don't spin your wheels searching for fairness, because *sometimes life isn't fair*.

"I accept the universe!"

Margaret Fuller

Express your feelings. If someone hurts you, talk to him or her. If you're angry, that's okay. Express your feelings in a way that doesn't blame or hurt you or the other person. Focus on the behavior, not the person.¹ **Example:** "It really makes me mad when I hear that lies are being told about me." Talk about your feelings with someone you trust—a true friend who will listen and understand. Sing, dance, laugh, or cry. Crying can help you release your frustration.

Write about your feelings. Dr. James Pennebaker and Sandra Beall once did an experiment with 46 college students to find out how important it was to

¹ For more on this topic, see "Respect," pages 217–218.

express feelings related to problems. They divided the students into groups and asked them to write about their suffering. One group was told to stick to the facts; another group was told to also write about their feelings, frustrations, anger, and so on. The students who wrote about their feelings had higher blood pressure and heart rates after writing than the first group. Six months later, however, they had fewer illnesses, less tension, more peace of mind and insight, and were able to face painful things more easily. So get a journal to write in and let your feelings out. Learn from them; let sadness and suffering be your teachers.

CHECK IT OUT



Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank (New York: Bantam Books, 1993). The diary Anne Frank kept during the two years she and her family hid from the Nazis in an Amsterdam attic is an eloquent testament to the human spirit. Ages 12 & up.

Anne Frank Online

<http://www.annefrank.com/>

View a photo essay about Anne Frank's life, read excerpts from her diary, and learn about the Anne Frank Center USA.

The Diary of Latoya Hunter: My First Year in Junior High by Latoya Hunter (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). A young girl writes about the challenges of youth and the way it's shaped by the inner city. Ages 10–14.

Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo by Zlata Filipovic (New York: Viking Press, 1994). Shortly before war broke out in Sarajevo, 11-year-old Zlata Filipovic began to keep a diary. Moving and inspiring, it puts a human face on an inhuman tragedy. Ages 11 & up.

Get help if you need it. Sometimes it's not enough to write in a journal or talk to a friend. You might need to talk with an adult—a teacher, counselor, parent, religious leader, or someone else you trust. If people belittle or discount your feelings, you might end up feeling ashamed or worse. So find someone who will take you seriously and understand your fear and pain. If your body got sick, you'd go to a doctor. If your mind and soul are suffering, seek out a counselor, psychologist,



"I'm feeling burned out. Are you in?"

CHECK IT OUT



Kids Help Phone

1-800-668-6868

<http://kidshelp.sympatico.ca/>

Canada's only toll-free national telephone counseling service for children and youth ages 4–19.

National Youth Crisis Hotlines

1-800-HIT-HOME (1-800-448-4663)

Operated by Youth Development International

1-800-442-HOPE (1-800-442-4673)

Operated by Children's Rights of America

<http://www.cra-us.org/>

Try to make it better. Take positive action. If you fail a test, study harder next time. If you tell a lie, admit it. If you break a window, repair it. If you have an illness, follow your doctor's advice. When you redirect your energy from suffering to making things better, you stop being a victim.

"Although the world is full of suffering,
it is full also of the overcoming of it."

Helen Keller

Take good care of yourself. Eat well. Get enough sleep. Leave time in your life for daydreaming, meditation, relaxation, recreation, and goofing off. Reward yourself for taking care of yourself.²

Let go. Have you ever seen a rotten tree branch wedged in a gutter? Before long, all kinds of junk are snagged by the branch. By itself, the tree branch isn't harmful, but the debris it collects can cause the gutter to clog and overflow. If you cling to your difficulties, you might obstruct your own progress. Try to let go of your problems and move on. Know what you can control and what you can't control, what you can change and what you're powerless to change. You'll be healthier, happier, and more successful in everything you do.

Learn and grow from your experiences, including the ones that hurt. You'll develop wonderful character traits as a result. You might become more patient, tolerant, understanding, and helpful. You might learn how to take better care of your body so you're healthier for the rest of your life. You might become more assertive and confident, and develop leadership skills. Your friends might respect you more for setting a good example. You might even become a hero! Best of all, you'll probably develop more empathy, understanding, and compassion for others.

Character Dilemmas

For journaling or writing essays, discussion, debate, role-playing, reflection

Suppose that . . .

1 Your best friend decides that she doesn't want to be friends with you anymore. How might you turn your suffering into a positive experience so you aren't hurt so badly? How might you stick up for yourself and, at the same time, treat your former friend kindly?

2 You have a friend whose parents are getting divorced. Your friend is devastated. He starts missing school, and his grades begin to fall. He keeps to himself and ignores you and his other friends. How might you help your friend to cope? What could you say without being preachy?

3 Lately your older sister has been crying a lot. You know that something has happened to hurt her. But every time you try to talk with her, she slams the door in your face. How might you help her, even if she won't tell you what's happened? Or should you just ignore her?

4 Your father loses his job, and your family moves to another state. Once there, your mother starts working, too, and you end up taking on more of the housework. Your grades start to slip and your social life is nonexistent. What might you do to help your family and yourself endure these difficult changes and times?

5 You feel like a loser, hate the way you look, and are convinced that you have no talents or abilities at all. You're sure that good things only happen to other people, never to you. What might you do to change your suffering into something positive? How might you change the way you feel about yourself? Be realistic.

6 There's a young child in your family or neighborhood who has stopped speaking and hides from people. What might you do to help?

Activities

WRITE IN YOUR JOURNAL about things that have hurt you physically or emotionally. Write about what you've done to feel better—or what you might do if you're still suffering. Then follow through.³

CHECK IT OUT

A Book of Your Own: Keeping a Diary or Journal by Carla Stevens (New York: Clarion Books, 1993). Practical suggestions plus excerpts from diaries past and present. Ages 9–13.

Totally Private & Personal: Journaling Ideas for Girls and Young Women by Jessica Wilber (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1996). Written by a 14-year-old girl, this book has ideas for keeping a fun and creative journal, special sections about growing up, and helpful resources. Ages 11–16.

WRITE A POEM that begins "I hurt most when. . ." Or write a poem about suffering, what you can learn from it, how to face it, how not to hurt others—or anything else you want to write about.⁴

³ See page 92 for a list of fiction books written in journal style.

⁴ See "Communication," page 57, for a list of resources for young writers.

COLLECT STORIES, POEMS, DIARIES, or quotations by writers who have written about pain and suffering. *Examples:* William Shakespeare, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Edgar Allan Poe, William Wordsworth, Norman Vincent Peale. (You might also look through the Bible, the Koran, the Talmud, or other religious or reflective works.) What can you learn from them about endurance, patience, and strength? What are their attitudes toward adversity? Here are three quotations to get you started:

♥: “A Wounded deer—leaps highest.” *Emily Dickinson*

♥: “Those who aim at great deeds must also suffer greatly.” *Marcus Licinius Crassus*

♥: “I do not believe that sheer suffering teaches. If suffering alone taught, all the world would be wise, since everyone suffers. To suffering must be added mourning, understanding, patience, love, openness and the willingness to remain vulnerable.” *Anne Morrow Lindbergh*

BRAINSTORM “CURES” FOR THE BLUES. Make a list of things you might do to help yourself feel better the next time you’re down or depressed. (Be sure that your list includes “Talk to someone I trust” and “Get help if I need it.”)

RESEARCH THE RELATIONSHIP between health and emotions.⁵ Find out how eating and exercise can affect the way you feel. Invite a nutritionist to your class or club to give a presentation and answer questions.

Variation: Interview a doctor or psychiatrist about depression and disease. Ask questions like:

- Does depression weaken the body’s ability to fight off disease?
- Do some diseases cause people to feel depressed?
- What kinds of help are available for people who are depressed?

LEARN WHAT GALILEO ENDURED. Research this famous astronomer (or another scientist you choose) to find out what kinds of opposition he faced during his lifetime and how he endured. Write a story or skit about his life.

CALCULATE HOW MUCH IT COSTS to get help. Suppose that you need counseling to help you endure a prob-

lem in your life. Find out how much money it would cost for six months of counseling by a 1) school psychologist, 2) social worker, 3) psychologist, 4) psychotherapist, and 5) psychiatrist. You’ll need to find out how much per hour each type of counselor gets paid. Will you meet with your counselor once a month? Once a week? Twice a week? Figure the costs, then compare them on a graph or chart.

FIND OUT WHO NEEDS HELP ENDURING. Check your neighborhood or community. Visit a hospital, children’s hospital, senior citizens’ center, nursing home or rest home, juvenile detention center, or homeless shelter. (Be sure to get permission, and go with a chaperon.) Ask what you can do to help. TIP: Don’t forget your own family.

MAKE ACTIVITY KITS FOR CHILDREN at a hospital or homeless shelter. Include pencils, crayons, markers, paper, coloring books, clay, glue, glitter, colored paper, pictures from magazines, yarn, safety scissors, etc. TIP: Be sure to contact the hospital or shelter first to find out what they want or need.

CREATE A SKIT that shows what to do when disaster strikes. Depending on where you live, choose one or more of the following topics: a tornado or hurricane, earthquake, fire, mudslide, drought, flood. Perform your skit for other students, younger children, your club or youth group, your community group, and anyone else who’s interested.

LOCATE WORKS OF ART that depict suffering. Look through art books in your school or local library, or visit an art museum. You might start your search by looking for paintings by Cimabue, Donatello, Fra Angelico, Daumier, Picasso, Goya, Munch, Titian, Van der Weyden, Grunewald, and Dali. For each painting you find, decide what it means to you. What do you think the artist’s attitude was toward suffering?

EXPLORE THE HEALING POWERS OF MUSIC. Many people around the world believe that music has special healing powers. What do you think? Form your own opinion by listening to many different types of music. You might want to start with music categorized as “relaxation,” “healing,” or “New Age.” Ask at your local library or music store, or find a local radio station that plays relaxing music.

⁵ See “Health,” pages 103–114.