

When bad things happen - overcoming adversity and developing resilience

Information for Young People

What are bad things?

There are lots of things that can make life tough, often things that are not in your control. Usually, the difficulty will involve your family, your friends, your neighbourhood or your school. As these are the people and places that have the most effect on you as you grow older. The sorts of problems we are talking about are:

- Having an ill parent
- Parents who fight and argue a lot
- Losing a parent
- Parents divorcing
- Parents who drink a lot of alcohol or take street drugs
- Parent/friend who is in trouble with the police
- Friends who take street drugs
- Your family trying to manage without enough money
- Living in an area where you don't feel safe, or see/experience violence
- Living away from your parents, e.g. in foster carer or a children's home
- Being bullied
- Being physically or sexually abused

Several of these things can happen together which makes it more difficult to cope.

What does it mean to have resilience?

Bad things happen to everyone. These experiences may be very difficult, yet some children show a remarkable ability to manage and cope. We call these children 'resilient'. Some children can be more resilient than others which may explain why children with the same family may react differently to a traumatic event, such as a death in the family.

When bad things happen, you may feel sad and worried, angry and stressed. Life can become tough sometimes, so learning how to cope is an important skill we need to have. If life was always perfect then we would never develop coping skills or learn what makes us feel better. So dealing with difficulties can help us learn how to cope with problems when they crop up, as we know what works for us. Having a friend to talk to, having an interest which distracts us from our worries, chilling out by listening to music or surfing the net can all be ways of coping.

How can I make things easier for myself?

Things that make life difficult are often completely out of your control. But there are things you can do to make them have less of an effect on you. This doesn't mean managing things on your own, but asking for help, sometimes even outside your family. You could start by confiding in someone you trust. If that doesn't work, you could try other things, such as:

- Spend more time doing something you enjoy and are good at. This may be something you do at school, for example, your favourite subject, or it may be a sport such as football, swimming or dancing, or another activity like music.
- Use a grown up outside of the close family, such as a teacher, a youth worker, a grandparent or a social worker for support. If you can't think of anyone, your school may provide a mentor.
- Encourage your family to keep doing the things that make you have a happy time together, even if you are all struggling through a difficult situation. This will help you to feel closer and warmer towards each other
- Think about joining an after school activity club in your neighbourhood. This will let you have fun safely, and may give you time away from the stress at home or with friends. You may also make different friends who may be more supportive.

Coping with the problems we have mentioned is not easy. It is in no way a sign of weakness if you feel you cannot manage on your own; it is more a sign of strength that you know when to ask for help.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists. (2013). Mental Health and Growing Up: Factsheets for Parents, Teachers and Young People (4th ed.). Cambridge: Royal College of Psychiatrists.

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