

dealing with rejection

Getting rejected can be hard. It can make you sad, hurt, surprised, or angry. In general, getting rejected rarely feels good. So how do people deal with it? This factsheet is to share some tools and strategies to help you prepare for, cope with, and recover from rejection.

Why does rejection hurt sometimes?

Rejection hurts. It often feels personal, like we weren't good enough for someone or something, and that can lead us to lots of other negative thoughts or feelings about ourselves. And sometimes that emotional pain can feel similar in our bodies to physical pain (e.g., feeling your heart drop, getting a headache or feeling woozy, noticing a rising "fight or flight" sensation, etc.).

Before Rejection

One way to take the sting out of rejection is to be ready for it. This doesn't mean that you should stop caring about things or stop taking risks. Instead, it means thinking about why you want things and experiences, what it means when you can't have them, and recognizing where you may need supports to help you feel less alone if and when rejection happens. Here are some things to consider:

- **Recognizing rejection in your life.** Maybe your friends don't like the movie you want to see, or maybe your neighbour's dog runs away when you want to pet it – we get rejected all the time.

Recognizing and accepting the little ways that you might experience rejection can help make it easier when you get rejected for bigger things (like relationships, or jobs, or school).

- **Learn from taking risks.** Rejection can happen when we take risks and ask for what we want, so putting yourself out there in low-stakes ways can help you learn how rejection feels, and how to handle it. Try borrowing something from a friend, or asking at your favourite restaurant if they're hiring. If you get rejected, reflect on the experience.

- **Avoid putting all your eggs in one basket.** Rejection can hurt because we put a lot of energy into believing that things are supposed to go a certain way, or that one thing we want is necessary to make us happy. But doing that can cut us off from other unexpected or exciting possibilities. While it's good to put energy into a relationship, it's also good to put energy into friendships or hobbies so that you don't put too much pressure on one person for your happiness.

- **Talk to other people about getting rejected.** Knowing that other people have gone through the same thing, and that there are people in your life who will support you, can make the worry of rejection seem like less of a catastrophic event.

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During Rejection

Rejection can happen in lots of ways: in person, online, by phone/text, etc. Sometimes it's a surprise, and sometimes you know it's coming. It can be hard to know exactly how you'll react, but here are some things to consider on how to deal with being rejected:

- **Take time to cool off.** It can be a good idea to take some time away from someone who has rejected you. If it hurts or if you feel angry, this can be particularly important so that you don't do or say something that you'll regret. Hurting them back may feel satisfying in the moment, but it won't help in the long run.
- **Allow yourself to feel all the emotions you feel.** There is no right way to feel when you've been rejected. Some folks feel disappointed, sad, angry, etc. – all of those emotions are valid. Remember, nursing your feelings is your responsibility. It's okay to need support, but consider other people you can go to instead of making the person(s) who rejected you deal with your feelings.
- **Surround yourself with supportive people.** Being around people who make you feel good and care about you can be very helpful. Just because someone has rejected you doesn't mean that there aren't lots of other people who do accept you.
- **Or take time to be alone.** As great as family and friends can be, it can also help to be by yourself for a little while. It's okay to lean on other people, but it's also okay to take a break from people. Enjoy your own company for a while.
- **Take care of yourself.** You often need rest to heal with physical pain. The same can be said of the pain of rejection, so treat yourself! Some people like exercising, or ice cream, or watching their favorite movies – do what makes you feel better.
- **Build your self-esteem.** Being rejected can make us feel bad about ourselves. Try making a list of your accomplishments or things you like about yourself. This can be helpful in reminding you of good things about you or good things you still have in your life. If you're struggling to think of anything to put on those lists, ask people you trust to help.
- **Talk to professionals.** Sometimes friends and family don't have the right words or advice to help you through the harder parts of rejection. Counsellors, therapists, and other support services are available for short- or long-term assistance to help people heal. It's totally okay to seek out this kind of help if you need it.

After Rejection

Accepting rejection can be difficult, even after the initial hurt has passed. Here are some things to think about when working on accepting rejection:

- **Healing takes time.** As much of a cliché as it is, time does help. Healing can't be rushed or predicted: if you end up feeling better for a bit and then worse again later, it's okay. Healing can look like a curved road with ups and downs – your experience will be unique to you, influenced by your situation and/or the nature of the rejection.
- **Taking it personally.** If it feels like someone's rejection of you was personal, maybe it was. And that's okay! Maybe you have different interests, different values, or different goals. Just because one person doesn't like or appreciate something about you doesn't mean that other people won't.

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- Reflecting on the experience. Every experience can teach us something, even getting rejected. Reflecting on the experience can help you prepare and grow for the next time you are rejected. What did you learn? Would you do anything differently?
- Keep taking risks. The hurt or experience of a rejection can sit with you for a while, and that's okay. But it's important to find ways to work with that feeling, not be limited by it. Rejection might be a part of your life experience, but it doesn't define you as a person. You have lots to offer!

Other Resources

Here are some services where you can connect with someone about dealing with rejection:

- Good2talk: 1-886-925-5454 | good2talk.ca (for post-secondary students)
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 | kidshelpphone.ca (for youth age 20 and under)
- LGBT Youthline: 1-800-268-9688 | youthline.ca (for LGBT+ youth ages 26 and under)

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