



Helping your child cope with rejection

Sooner or later, most children experience rejection at school—whether it's not winning a talent contest, being cut from an athletic team, or missing the last word in the spelling bee. And the rejection usually hurts.

How can parents help children cope with rejection? The most important thing is to be a good listener. This means not only hearing the words, but also feeling the emotions behind the words.

There are some days when we feel good about who we are and what we can do. On those days we seem to be able to handle rejection without feeling too downhearted. Other times we feel very low—and then rejection by others often seems to confirm our lowest opinions of ourselves.

One of the first ways to help children overcome the sting of rejection is to restore the child's sense of balance about it. After all, it is usually just a specific plan or project or behavior that is rejected—not the child's whole life or being.

Rejection can also be a positive influence. It teaches children that other people will not always agree with their ideas or plans. Sooner or later, every child must learn that everyone has the right to disagree with what we think or say.

Children can also learn that the effect that rejection has on them depends not so much on what was said, but on what

they decide to do about it. For example, a child might think of rejection as being the same as failure. In this case, the child might react with self-defeating feelings of self-pity—which in turn leads to loneliness, humiliation, and defeat.

A better reaction for the child is to ask: "What does that rejection or criticism mean to me?" Then the child learns to evaluate rejection or criticism, rather than accepting it at face value. This can lead to renewed determination to believe more firmly in what the child thinks is most worthwhile. And then, next time, he will give it his very best effort with renewed vigor and enthusiasm.

Most people who are successful have felt some form of rejection along the way. And what gives adults the courage to handle rejection in their lives in a positive way is often the echo of their own parent's words: "Don't let a simple rejection defeat you." "Learn something positive about yourself from what your critics are saying." "Give it another try." "Learn to believe in yourself."

*"To bring up a child in the way he should go,
travel that way yourself once in a while."*

—Josh Billings