

## The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

### How To Respond To A Child's Disappointment

from the American Counseling Association

Welcome to the holiday season. It's usually a time of happy things, but can also bring big disappointments for some children because they didn't get that present they wanted so badly.

As parents we want to make our children happy, but there are times when we just aren't going to hit that target. We may misunderstand what was so important in our child's eyes, or, more commonly, what was desired was simply impractical, unaffordable or downright impossible. Whatever the reason, the result is a disappointed child. So how do Mom and Dad cope with that?

You can start by simply listening to what your child has to say. Minimizing or discounting what has caused the disappointment will only make things worse. And keep in mind that holiday disappointments come in all kinds of sizes and flavors. It may be a toy that wasn't received, or a classmate who suddenly is ignoring your child, or a holiday party that "all" the other kids were invited to, but your child was left out.

While the cause of the disappointment may seem unimportant and trivial to you, to your child it's a very real and meaningful hurt. You know the disappointment will be soon forgotten, but for your child that disappointment is a big deal and one that he or she feels will never be overcome. It's important to remember that your values and understanding are not your child's.

You also don't want to respond to your child's disappointment with a reward or pleasant experience intended to make the hurt disappear. Doing so trains your child to expect a reward whenever something disappointing occurs, helping to establish a pattern of behavior that can lead to problems later in life.

Instead, talk "with" your child, rather than "to" him or her. Don't make it an interrogation, but instead encourage your child to explain what he or she is feeling.

Try to communicate that you understand the disappointment being felt. While it's fine to let your son or daughter know that you understand because you've also had times when you were disappointed, don't try to top their story with your own bigger stories.

Disappointing events will occur in your child's life. Don't ignore or minimize them. Instead, learn to listen, to understand and to empathize. This will help you help your child get past the hurt and gain support from your love.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).*

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