

# **WHEN LIFE SUCKS FOR KIDS**

**Ideas and tips for when you feel mad, worried or sad – or when life goes horribly wrong!**

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**Some boring, adult stuff**

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The material in this book should not be seen as a replacement for individual therapy. Please see your doctor if you have any concerns about your child's safety or psychological well being.

Names and details in this book have been changed to protect the identity of individuals.

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# READ THIS FIRST

Hi there, welcome to “When Life Sucks for Kids”.

## Does Life Really Suck for Kids?

Some adults think their kids’ lives don’t have hard bits. They think that kids should be happy all the time.

You and I know that’s just not true. Sure, there are lots of cool things in your lives which DO make you happy. But there are hard things too. You get upset, worried, mad, stressed and sad sometimes – just like adults.

How do I know this? I’m a psychologist who works with kids and teens. A psychologist is a person who helps people cope with difficult things. For the last 20 years I’ve talked to hundreds of young people about times when they have felt sad, stressed, worried, mad or scared about things in their lives. Which means I know for sure that kids have hard times in life.

## What is this book about

This book is for 8 to 13 year olds. It is about what to do and how to cope when you feel worried, sad or mad, or when things all go wrong in life. These are called tough situations.

For each tough situation there is some information about what happens, what's normal, how to cope and ideas about what to do and things to say to yourself.

Here's something *really important* to remember: I don't know you or your situation. This means that some of the advice I've given in this book might not exactly suit you in your situation.

This means you should use this book as a list of **ideas**, rather than a **rule book**. If some of the things I have suggested to do sound like they won't help – then always make sure you check it out with another adult first.

## Important Note!

Some kids feel so angry or upset that they sometimes want to hurt themselves. If you feel like this or know another kid who feels like this - then you need to get help from a real life person, right now, in real life.

Here are some ways you can get help from a real person right now:

- **Go on the web and type in: [reachout.com.au](http://reachout.com.au)**
- **Call Kids Help Line (1800 55 1800)**
- **Speak to your parents, a teacher, a neighbour, or another adult you trust**

- **Tell an older brother or sister and ask them to help you talk to an adult**
- **Go to see your doctor (you can ask a parent or adult to get you an appointment)**
- **Email or text an adult**
- **Make an appointment with a school counsellor or chaplain at your school**
- **Make an appointment with a psychologist, counsellor or other health worker (you can ask your parents or a teacher to help you with getting an appointment)**

Sometimes it is scary, embarrassing or tiring to talk to people about tough situations or feeling bad. But you should still try. Talking to people in tough times is one of the most important things humans need to do to help them cope.

One last thing to remember: **You are not alone in having tough stuff to deal with.** Every kid and adult has times they feel worried, sad, stressed or mad. Sometimes it will SEEM like everyone else around you is perfectly happy, and it feels like you are the only one with problems.

But that's not true. There are lots of people around you – in your suburb, your school, and even in your family and friends – who will understand what it is like to feel like you do right now.

You're not alone.

Good luck, and I hope this book helps.

**Kirrilie Smout**

## PS: A note about the word "Parents" in this Book:

In this book I quite often use the word "parents" or "Mum or Dad".

I know there are lots of kids who might be reading this book who don't have a Mum or a Dad, or either one. If this is true for you, please remember when I say "parent" I am talking about an adult who cares for or looks after you. This might be a grandma, grandpa, aunt or uncle – or another carer.

## A note about the stories in this Book:

In this book there are lots of stories about real people I have met and what has happened to them, or what they think and feel. You should know that I have not used REAL NAMES in this book. I have also changed some of the details so no-one will be able to know who that person is.



WHEN LIFE SUCKS WITH FRIENDS  
AND CLASSMATES

## Another Kid is Being Really Mean to Me

Read this section if:

You get teased  
Someone is bullying you  
Someone is being mean to you  
Your feelings have been hurt by  
people being nasty to you

Sometimes humans (both adults and kids) are very nasty to each other. Here are some of the mean things kids sometimes do:

- **Call people mean names**
- **Tell people they can't play or join in**
- **Steal or wreck people's things**
- **Share someone's private information with other people**
- **Spread rumours about people**
- **Write mean things about people on social media sites (like Instagram)**
- **Send mean texts about people**
- **Hit, kick, push or punch people**

*Why are people mean to others?*

There are a few different reasons why some people do mean and nasty things. Here are a few:

- **Saying mean things makes them feel powerful**
- **Some kids think that being mean to someone will make other people like them more**
- **Other people have been mean to them, and they are copying what they have seen done**

Sometimes kids don't mean to be nasty. They don't always realise that what they are doing hurts people's feelings.

*But why are they being mean to ME?*

*Here are a few different reasons why people might be being mean to you:*

- **You are just unlucky. You are in the wrong place at the wrong time.**
- **Some kids might think it's okay to be mean to you because they know you won't be mean back to them.**
- **You might be a bit different (in the way you look or act) from other kids and you stand out.**
- **Some kids might be jealous of you for having more friends, being smarter, good at something, or having more stuff than other people.**

## Things to Try

### Tell an adult

If someone is being mean to you quite often, it is usually a good idea to talk to an adult about it.

Unless it is urgent or an emergency, you should wait until there is enough time for you and the adult to talk about it properly.

It can be embarrassing or tough to tell an adult when someone is being mean. If you think it would be easier not to talk to the adult “face to face”, then you could email, send a text or write a note. Say, “I feel upset about something someone has said or done and I’d like to talk to you about it”.

Here is something important to know: The adult won’t always be able to stop the person from being mean or do anything about it, but you should tell an adult anyway for two important reasons:

- 1. Sometimes the adult can help you think about what to do and how to cope with your hurt feelings**
- 2. Sometimes the adult can help people be less mean to you in the future**

Try to act confidently. Don't let people who are being mean, know you are hurt or scared.

Normally when someone is being mean, we feel upset. When we feel upset we act scared, sad and hurt. Unfortunately, unless the person who has been mean is a very good friend, acting scared, sad and hurt sometimes makes things worse. There are two reasons for this:

**Firstly**, some kids are *more likely* to be mean to kids who look scared

and afraid. Sometimes the more scared and upset you look – the more likely it is that this kid will keep being mean to you.

The **second** reason is that when we act scared, hurt and upset – often we feel worse. The more scared, upset and hurt we **act** (for example crying, running away, looking worried), the more scared, upset and hurt we **feel**.

So instead of acting scared or hurt, try this:

- **Smile, look relaxed, bold and confident. If you have to walk past the mean people, walk with your head up and don't avoid them.**
- **If you need to sit near people who are being nasty, talk to people around you if possible and laugh and smile like you would if they weren't there.**
- **If someone has been mean to you in the classroom, keep on talking and doing what you would normally do. You can sometimes even laugh or make a joke about what has happened.**
- **Try to act like you aren't that bothered.**
- **Don't be mean back to the person.**

When you act in bold, confident ways, mean kids will often then start to be a bit less mean.

One exception to the "Don't act hurt and scared suggestion" is if the mean person is a good friend. If you are very good friends with someone who has hurt your feelings, then it is okay to show your friend that you have been hurt by them. You can read more about this in the chapter: "My friend and I Had a Big Fight"

Try being a little bit friendly towards the person who has been mean to you

Sometimes it helps to be a little friendly towards the kid who is being mean.

For example, you could:

- Say "Hi" as you walk past them at school or "Bye" if you walk past them as you are leaving
- Say "good shot" if they do something good in PE/fitness
- Pick up something they dropped or get them a pencil if you are going past the pencil bucket
- Smile at the person when you see them

There are two reasons why being a bit friendly can sometimes help:

1. **Most kids find it harder to be mean to kids who are nice to them.**
2. **Some bullies pick on kids who seem less powerful than them. If you act in a friendly way, you actually seem more powerful, which makes it less likely people will be mean to you.**

If you have acted in a friendly way towards the mean kid a few times and it makes the bully act even more mean towards you – *then stop doing it for a while.*

A quick tip: When you speak to/ smile at/help the kid being mean to you – do it as fast as you can and then move on. Don't try to have a long conversation, or hang around them for long. Be friendly for 10 seconds and get out of there!

If you feel scared about being friendly, give this chapter to an adult to read, and ask for their advice.

**Try to stay away from people who keep on acting mean towards you**

If you have tried to act friendly and it didn't work, then try to stay away from the mean person whenever you can.

Figure out where and when the kid is being mean to you. Then try to avoid those situations where possible.

For example, if someone is being nasty at the “pick up” spot after school, try to avoid standing there and go and stand next to the teacher instead.

Is someone always mean to you when you are in their reading group at school? Maybe you could ask the teacher if you can change groups. Are people nasty to you when you are at netball training? Perhaps you could go to another training session.

Sometimes you can't avoid the places and times people are being mean to you. You can't stop going to school or doing important things, like sport. But there might be some situations you can avoid.

*Is your friend the person who is being mean?  
Tell them how you feel and what you would like  
them to do*

*Sometimes kids are friends with the person who is being mean to them. It's hard to stay away from friends. In this case, sometimes it helps to tell your friend two things:*

**Firstly**, tell them how you feel and **secondly**, try to tell them what you would like them to do instead.

*For example:*

- **"I feel upset when you laugh at my assignment. Can you please not make any comments about my school work"**
- **"I feel hurt when you talk to Isaiah and not me. Would you please talk to both of us?"**
- **"I feel sad when you talk to Jenny about me. Can you please not talk about me when I'm not there"**

*Try to act calmly and confidently when you say these things. Try*



*not to look angry, cry or be too upset. If you say this in a friendly, confident way, your friend is more likely to do what you ask.*

*If the person who is being mean to you is your friend, you should also read the next chapter in this book which is called “My friend and I Had a Big Fight”.*

## **Try to spend time with other friends or make new ones**

If you have asked your friend to stop doing mean things and they keep making you sad, then it might be time to spend time with other friends, or to find completely new friends. This is tough to do. Most kids find this hard, but it can make your life much happier.

You could try it out in small pieces. For example, you could spend recess times with some new friends and lunch times with your other friends. You could ask your parents if you can have some different people over to your house to play. You could spend time talking on the phone, messaging or playing games with a different group of friends.

If you feel like you don't have any other friends, then read through the chapter, “I Need Some New Friends” and try some of the ideas in that chapter.

## **Try to spend time thinking about other things**

Often kids that I talk to are thinking about the kids who are mean to them all the time. They can't stop thinking about them – at home and at school. This makes them feel worse.

It's important to try to think about other things in your life – not just

the kids who are mean to you. This is hard to do. The best way to think about other things is to try to keep busy doing interesting things.



For example:

- **Find out about a new hobby or sport**
- **Write a book/paint/practice music/do something creative**
- **Keep your mind busy at night time by listening to music or an audio (spoken) book**
- **Find a new project to do after school to keep you busy**

## Calm and Confident Sentences

- **It's not my fault that people are mean to me**
- **Everyone has to deal with mean people sometimes**
- **Perhaps they aren't even trying to be mean – or maybe they don't know how upset I am**
- **This won't last forever**
- **I have some plans to cope**
- **I'm okay**

## IDEAS AND THOUGHTS FROM AN ADULT WHO CARES ABOUT YOU

You might like to talk to an adult you trust about the ideas in this chapter and ask them if they have any other suggestions for you.

## I Need Some New Friends

Here are some reasons kids might not have many friends:

- **They have shifted schools**
- **They are shy and find it hard to talk**
- **They are a bit different from other kids at their school**
- **They've had a fight with old friends**

Tom, aged 10, told me he was feeling lonely all the time. I asked him about his friends and this is what he told me: My best friend at school moved to another state at the start of this year. Now I have no friends at all. I usually go to the library at lunch and recess or I just sit by myself. Sometimes I kick the football with these two other kids, but they don't really talk to me and I'm pretty sure they don't like me much. Everyone else has friends at school except me. It sucks.

If you feel like you don't have many friends, you might feel:

- **Lonely**
- **Jealous of other kids who seem to have lots of friends**
- **Worried that there is something wrong with you**
- **Embarrassed about not having friends**
- **Angry about being in this situation**
- **Scared that you will never have a good friend**

I want you to know some important things about lonely times.

**Firstly**, this won't last forever. Thousands of kids have times when they feel really lonely and then suddenly they make a friend, which then leads to them making another friend, and then another, and then another. Within no time at all, they go from not having any friends to having many friends.

**Secondly**, just because you don't have many friends right now, doesn't mean there is something wrong with you. It's not your fault.

## Things to Try

It is important to keep working on making new friends, even when it feels like it is hard, scary and tiring.

Here are SIX things you can do to make friends. You can do these things with kids at school or at other places like sporting events or get together with other kids.

### 1. Smile

Smiling *seems* like a little thing, but it's a powerful way to make friends.

When you smile at someone, a little part of that person's brain sends a message to that person saying, "this is a safe and friendly person". This means when you smile at people, they will act more friendly towards you.

So make sure you smile very often when you look at people. Even when you are feeling nervous!

## 2. Say hello and goodbye

Say hello and goodbye to other people, without waiting for them to say hello or goodbye to you first. When you walk past your classmates as you go into school, say hi. When you see them at the park or the shops after school, say hi. When you are leaving someone's house, or walking out the school grounds, or at the end of a sporting match, say goodbye.

You can also add in a few other words:

- **"Hi there"**
- **"Hey there"**
- **"How's it going?"**
- **"Good morning"**
- **"Have a good weekend"**
- **"See you later"**
- **"Have a good night"**
- **"See you tomorrow"**
- **"Bye for now"**
- **Some other words which mean hi/bye to you**

These "hello and goodbye words" are called greetings. Greetings help people feel good and want to be friendly towards you.

### 3. Ask questions

Another way to make friends is to ask other people questions.

Sometimes it is hard to think of questions to ask. Lots of adults aren't good at asking people questions so it's not surprising that kids have trouble doing it sometimes. But if you practice, you will get better at it.

Here's a way to help you think of questions: use the word **SHOPS**. Each of the letters in **SHOPS** stands for a word that will help you think of a question in that area. Here are the words:

**S** stands for Screens

**H** stands for Hobbies

**O** and **P** stands for Other People

**S** stands for School

Here are some example **SHOP** questions you can ask for each area:

#### **S** stands for Screen Questions

(these are questions about anything to do with a computer, phone or television screen):

- **"Do you watch this show on TV?"**
- **"What video games do you play?"**
- **"What is your favourite video game?"**
- **"Did you see this youtube clip?"**
- **"Have you seen that movie?"**



## H stands for Hobby Questions

(these are questions about things a person does when they are not at school):

- "Do you play a sport?"
- "How did your game go on the weekend?"
- "How's dancing going?"
- "Are you going to do that drama club next year?"
- "Did you win football on the weekend?"
- "What is your favourite book?"
- "What do you like best about the weekend?"

## O and P stands for Other People Questions

(these are questions about people the person knows):

- "How's your brother?"
- "Did you see Leigh on the weekend?"
- "What do you think of that new maths teacher?"
- "How's James?"
- "How's your mum?"
- "How old is your sister now?"
- "What's Lisa doing these days?"

## S stands for School/Study Questions

(these are questions about anything to do with school):

- "How was English?"

- "Did you finish that maths homework?"
- "Did you understand that assignment?"
- "What did you think of that new teacher?"
- "What are you doing for your history project?"

Next time you can't think of what to ask someone, think **SHOPS** and use the different letters to help you come up with some ideas of questions to ask.

You can also prepare some questions BEFORE you see someone. If you know your friend is coming around, think of some questions you can ask before they arrive. If you know you will be seeing some kids at school, think of some questions you can ask them in the morning before you go to school. If you are stuck, you can always ask a parent to help you.

#### 4. Give your opinion and tell people stuff

Another way to make friends is to say what you think (these are called your "opinions") and what you have done. Unless you talk about yourself, people won't really get to know you. If they don't get to know you, they can't be good friends with you.

If you can't think of what to say, think of the word "**SHOPS**" again.

Each letter in the word **SHOPS** stands for a topic you can say something about.

For example:

### **S** stands for Screen Questions:

Say something about what you do with screens or an opinion of something on a screen:

- **"I love Plants vs Zombies"**
- **"I watched this funny youtube video last night"**
- **"I'm going to see this movie in the holidays"**

### **H** stands for Hobby Questions:

Say something about your hobbies:

- **"We won our football game yesterday, it was really fun"**
- **"I hope we are going to do a new song at choir tonight"**
- **"I made a new necklace last night"**

### **OP** stands for Other People Questions:

Say something positive about another person:

- **"Meika did a great talk today in class"**
- **"Have you seen Jamie's new sneakers, they are cool"**
- **"My aunt is going to start coaching at karate"**

### **S** stands for School/Study Questions:

Say something about schoolwork or teachers:

- **"I have no idea what I am going to do for my project"**
- **"Art was really cool today"**
- **"Ms Smith is giving us so much homework!"**

## 5. Give a compliment

Another way to help make friends is to give compliments. A compliment is when you say something positive to someone. Here are some examples of compliments:

- **"I like your earrings"**
- **"Great kick"**
- **"I thought your talk was really good"**
- **"Cool sneakers"**
- **"You're funny"**
- **"Nice hair clip"**
- **"You're really good at maths"**
- **"That was a nice thing to do"**

When we give people compliments, they feel good about themselves when they are with us. This means they are more likely to enjoy being with us. Then they are more likely to want to be our friends.

## 6. Suggest an Activity

*One last way to make friends is to suggest activities. Kids like to be around other kids who have ideas about fun things to do. If you can make suggestions about activities, then kids are more likely to like being with you and you are more likely to make friends.*

*Before you go to school in the morning, or go to a place where you*

see other kids, try to think of 2 or 3 activities you could suggest. Then make the suggestion in a confident, friendly voice.

Note: Be careful to make your suggestions in a friendly way, rather than in a bossy way. Instead of saying, "We **HAVE** to play this game", say instead, "Do you want to play this game?"



Here are some examples of activity suggestions:

- **"Do you want to go to the playground?"**
- **"Want to kick the football?"**
- **"Shall we go on the computers in the library at lunchtime?"**
- **"Do you want to play that game?"**

*(And if you have permission from an adult):*

- **"Do you want to come over to my house?"**
- **"Do you want to play that game online with me?"**
- **"Shall we go to the park on the weekend?"**

## Calm and Confident Sentences

Here are some sentences to say to yourself:

- **Lots of people go through lonely times**
- **It's not my fault I need to make new friends**
- **This won't last, things will change at some point**
- **I can cope with this**
- **I have got some ideas about how to make friends – a little bit at a time**

## IDEAS AND THOUGHTS FROM AN ADULT WHO CARES ABOUT YOU

You might like to talk to an adult you trust about the ideas in this chapter and ask them if they have any other suggestions for you.

## I Feel Left Out

Read this section if:

You feel like your friends like their  
other friends more than you

You didn't get invited to something

Other kids are nicer to each  
other than to you

I was talking to a 9 year old girl called Anna last year. One day she told me that she felt left out at school. She had been friends with two other girls – Hannah and Tilly – for two years, but lately it seemed like they didn't want to be friends with her anymore. They would invite each other over for sleep overs, and not invite Anna. When they had to get into pairs at school, Hannah and Tilly would always choose each other. They talked to each other, and not to her. Anna said she didn't have any other close friends at school so she was stuck hanging out with them. She felt left out all the time.

When your friends (or just people you hang out with) act as though they like each other more than they like you, you will probably feel sad and hurt.



Being left out is very common. It has happened to most people. Ask any adult: "Have you ever felt a bit left out, or that your friends don't like you as much as other people?" They will most likely say yes.

## Why does it happen?

Being left out does not mean you are bad person or that there is something wrong with you. Kids leave other kids out for lots of different reasons. Here are some of them:

- **They might not know how much it hurts to be left out (perhaps it hasn't happened to them yet)**
- **Leaving you out might make them feel more powerful and they might like this feeling**
- **They might want to be really good friends with someone, and they think leaving you out will make them be better friends with someone else**
- **They might feel pressure from someone else (another kid or a parent) to leave someone out**

## Things to Try

Tell an adult about how you feel.

Tell an adult how you feel. This could be your parent, a school counsellor or a teacher. If you can't think of what to say, here are some sentence starters:

"Can I talk to you about something that has been upsetting me lately?"

"I've had a sad day. I keep thinking that X and Y don't like me that much"

"I'm feeling kind of hurt about this thing, do you mind if I explain it to you?"



Remember you can write them a note, send them an email or a text if it's hard to talk face to face.

Here's an important thing to know: The adult probably won't be able to *fix* this situation, but it is still important to talk to the adult for two reasons:

1. They can help you cope with it
2. They can help you feel less left out in the future

## Keep being friendly to your friends

If you are feeling left out you might be tempted to stop talking to your friends. You might still spend time with them but you stop suggesting activities, look sad or stop asking them questions. This is called “withdrawing”.

Withdrawing doesn't usually fix things. It doesn't make your friends want to be with you more than before. And it often makes it worse. Your friends might start to feel uncomfortable around you, which might make them leave you out more than they did before.

Instead of withdrawing, keep being as friendly as you can. Keep being the best friend that you can be.

Read the chapter before this on the 6 ways to make friends, and make sure you keep doing these things with your friends. This means:

- **Keep smiling**
- **Keep saying hello and goodbye**
- **Keep asking some questions of your friends ("How was that lesson?", "What you are doing on the weekend?")**
- **Keep giving your opinion and talking about what you have done**
- **Keep giving compliments**
- **Keep suggesting you and your friends do things together ("Want to go to the oval with me?")**

## Keep trying to make friends with kids you don't know

If you have been left out for a long time you might need to make some new friends. It's hard to make new friends.

Some kids find it scary to make new friends because they are worried their old friends will get mad at them.

But sometimes great things happen when you decide to make new friends. It might mean you get to have some wonderful new friends who don't leave you out.

Start being just a little bit friendly towards kids you don't know (or don't know very well).

Think about the kids at your school who have been friendly towards you in the past, or who seem to like some of the same things as you, and start being friendly towards them. Think about other kids you know through sport, your neighbourhood or through your family.

Read the last chapter on the six ways to make friends. Smile, greet, ask questions, say things, give compliments and suggest activities. Do some of things with these new people. This will help you get to know them.

Then you can ask an adult to help you decide how much time to spend with your old friends and how much time to spend with your new friends. At least this way you have some options, instead of just feeling stuck and left out.

## Calm and Confident Sentences

- **It's not my fault**
- **Being left out happens to most kids**
- **It's not going to last forever**

## IDEAS AND THOUGHTS FROM AN ADULT WHO CARES ABOUT YOU

*You might like to talk to an adult you trust about the ideas in this chapter and ask them if they have any other suggestions for you.*