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When Friendships End:
Parenting Through
Heartbreak

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In today's webinar

- How to help your children handle life's disappointments with strength and resilience
- Heartbreak is as a developmental experience
- Practical and research-based strategies



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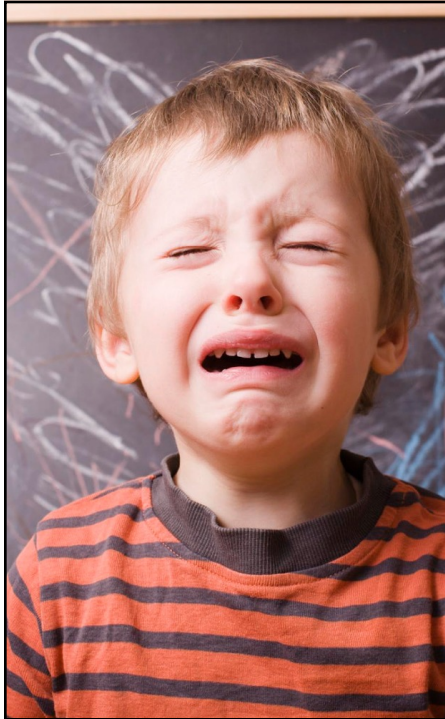
Heartbreak

- The Role of Disappointment:
 - Heartbreaks teach perseverance, emotional regulation, and problem-solving
 - The myth of the smooth road
 - "Pain is not a detour; it's part of the road." – L. Damour
- Parents' Role:
 - Validate feelings
 - Modeling healthy coping
 - Avoid overprotecting or minimizing the child's feelings



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Heartbreak is Opportunity: Preschool (3-5yo)

- Common disappointments
 - Losing a favorite toy, being excluded during play, sibling rivalry, friends won't share, not getting something you wanted
- Strategy
 - Use simple language to name emotions and validate: "You feel sad because you wanted to play with them and that makes sense."
 - Introduce coping tools like deep breaths or distraction.
 - Example: A child isn't invited to a birthday party. Parent response: "It's okay to feel left out, I would feel left out too. Let's think about something fun we can do together."



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Strategies (3-5yo)

- Validate Feelings: "It sounds like you're feeling sad because Liam didn't share the truck."
- Model Problem-Solving: "What could we say to Liam next time? Maybe, 'Can we take turns?'"
- Encourage Perspective-Taking: "Maybe Liam wasn't ready to share yet. What else could we play with?"
- Not being chosen as the "leader" during group play. "I know you really wanted to lead today. Maybe next time you can suggest another way to play."
- Losing a favorite blanket or toy. "It's okay to feel sad about your lost toy. Let's think about how we can find it or make a special place for your other toys."



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Skills to Develop (3-5yo)

- Emotional regulation: naming and expressing emotions
- Social skills: sharing, taking turns, and handling conflict
- Self-calming
- Perspective taking
- Initiating and building friendships



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Heartbreak: Elementary Age 6-10

- Common Disappointments
 - Not making a team, losing a competition, arguments with friends, first "crushes", peers seeking social power, first experience with rough treatment through text, exclusion
- Strategies
 - Teach problem-solving: "What could you try next time?"
 - Emphasize effort over outcomes: "I'm proud of how hard you worked."
 - Example: A child works hard on a school project but doesn't win. Parent response: "Winning feels great, but what's important is how much you learned doing this."



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Examples and Strategies (6-10 yo)

Struggling to learn a new skill while peers succeed. "Everyone learns at their own pace. I'm proud of you for not giving up. Let's keep practicing together."

Being overlooked for a class award. "It's disappointing not to be recognized, but I see how hard you worked, and that's what really matters."

Teach Positive Self-Talk: "Not everyone gets invited to every party. I'm still a good friend and fun to be with."

Focus on Effort, Not Outcome: "You tried your best in the game, and that's what matters. What can you practice for next time?"

Encourage New Opportunities: "Let's invite someone over for a playdate and see what fun you can have."

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Skills to Develop 6-10 y/o

- Coping with rejection
- Building self-esteem independent of external validation
- Practicing flexibility and adaptability
- Improved Emotional Regulation
- Understanding and Practicing Empathy
- Building and Maintaining Friendships
- Developing a Sense of Responsibility
- Navigating Group Dynamics

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6-10 is typically the time **our** emotions are first affected by **their** heartbreaks

- Examine your own experience and careful of your reactions – talk to someone (not them) about it
- Avoid getting mad in front of them - they can become afraid of upsetting you and then hide information
- Cognitive changes that happen around 10y/o can look like lowered self esteem – don't let that worry you
 - How self-esteem is built: not by excessive praise



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Heartbreak LE and MS: 11-14 y/o

- Common Disappointments:
 - Friendship breakups, academic struggles, unrequited crushes, intentional cruelty, online and electronic exclusion/mean behavior
- Strategies
 - Validate feelings: "Friendships change, and that's hard."
 - Encourage journaling or talking it out.
 - Example: A friend stops talking to them. Parent response: "I see how hurt you are. Relationships can be tricky, and sometimes people grow apart."
 - Here is where you become a benevolent coach – less directive, more listening and letting them be the expert. Often, they need to vent and don't want a solution



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Examples and Strategies 11-14

Failing to qualify for a school team. "I know this feels tough, but trying out took courage. Let's think about what you can improve for next time."

Being excluded from a group event. Parent response: "It's hard to feel left out. Friendships can be tricky, but let's focus on the friends who value spending time with you."

Normalize Disappointment: Carefully share your own stories of failure and what you learned.

Encourage Perseverance: Talk about famous people who failed at first but kept practicing, improving, and trying.

Reframe the Narrative: "Not making the team gives you more time to try something new."



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More Examples and Strategies 11-14 y/o

Promote Emotional Awareness: "It's okay to feel hurt when friendships change. Let's talk about what you're feeling."

Guide Conflict Resolution: Role-play how to address a problem with a friend respectfully.

Encourage Self-Worth: "You don't need to change who you are to fit in. Your true friends will appreciate you."

Teach Boundaries: "You get more of what you accept in friendships. If you accept unkind behavior, you will cultivate unkind friends."

Teach Kindness and Inclusion: "Find those people who need a friend and be there for them"



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Skills to Develop 11-14 y/o

- Resilience in the face of failure.
- Problem-solving and perseverance.
- Strengthening identity and independence.
- Advanced Emotional Regulation
- Deeper Empathy and Perspective-Taking
- Strengthening Identity and Self-Concept
- Building Stronger Peer Relationships
- Developing Independence and Decision-Making Skills



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More Skills to Develop 11-14 y/o

- Emotional intelligence: recognizing and managing complex feelings
 - The role of brain development here
- Conflict resolution and boundary-setting.
 - Being an upstander in the face of unkind behavior towards others
 - What are your family rules about participating online and electronically in group chats?
- Self-advocacy and resilience in social dynamics.
- Advocacy for others and social justice



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How Parenting Changes in Adolescence

We become more “Curious Coach”

- Let them be the expert
- Allow them to experience natural consequences
- Ask questions without interrogating
- Give Examples: “I heard.....do you think that is true?”
- Be available to talk when they want to, About what they want
 - Car
 - Bedtime
 - When we want to watch a show



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The process

- Check your own emotional reaction to their heartbreak
- Validate their emotion and empathize but don't pity or save them (it makes sense that you are feeling...)
- Reframe their heartbreak in your own mind as an opportunity to teach a skill - remember the skills they are working at in each developmental phase
- Normalize their experience (life includes this, that stinks but you are strong enough to handle it)
- Encourage them to develop and use their own emotional regulation and comforting strategies (help them develop a list of coping skills)



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Summary

- Heartbreak is a rich opportunity to build necessary skills.
- It hurts us to see them struggle, but struggle is the only thing that builds the ability to recover from challenges, adapt to change, and grow stronger
- Facing disappointments helps children develop essential life skills such as emotional regulation, problem-solving, and empathy
- Your role as parents is to guide, support, and teach, not to eliminate challenges.



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