When rejection hurts

Sometimes a comment, change of plans, disagreement or being left out can hurt a LOT. This guide helps you notice your feelings and find support in ways that work for you.

You are not doing anything wrong by having feelings.

Some people use the letters RSD for very intense pain linked to rejection or criticism. RSD is not a separate formal diagnosis. You never need a label to deserve kindness.

What would you like help with?

- [ ] Feeling left out
- [ ] Worrying someone is upset
- [ ] Handling criticism
- [ ] Big feelings after arguments
- [ ] Asking for help
- [ ] Something else

My own words or pictures about what I hope for:

A gentle reminder

You can skip any question. Write, draw, point, talk or ask someone to help. This workbook belongs to you.

Meet your rejection alarm

Your brain sometimes tries to protect you by spotting possible rejection quickly. An alarm can be loud even when you do not know exactly what happened.

Something that happened

A friend was quiet when I said hello.

What my alarm guessed

They do not like me anymore.

The guess might be right, wrong or only part of the story. We can take feelings seriously without making an instant decision.

What can make my alarm ring?

- [ ] A cancelled plan
- [ ] A friend not replying
- [ ] Being corrected
- [ ] A joke that hurts
- [ ] Not being picked
- [ ] An unexpected change

Another time my alarm rang:

A gentle reminder

Real unkindness, bullying and exclusion matter. You deserve adult support when someone treats you badly.

My body and my feelings

Big feelings can show up in many different ways. There is no single correct response. Circle, tick, draw or describe what you notice.

I might notice...

- [ ] Hot face
- [ ] Tight tummy
- [ ] Fast heartbeat
- [ ] Tears
- [ ] Wanting to hide
- [ ] Angry words
- [ ] Going quiet
- [ ] Restless movement

How loud does the feeling seem today? (optional)

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = quiet alarm 5 = very loud alarm

What helps an adult notice when I am overwhelmed?

A gentle reminder

A feeling is not a problem you must hide. You can ask for a break, quiet company or more space.

What happened? What did I guess?

It can help to separate an event from the first frightening story your brain tells you. This does not mean dismissing real hurt.

What happened? (Just what I know for sure)

What did my rejection alarm tell me it meant?

Could there be another explanation? I can also say "I do not know yet".

When something really is unfair

You do not need to make excuses for bullying, cruelty or repeated exclusion. Talk to a trusted adult about what happened and what support you need.

Find a pause that fits you

When feelings are strong, reasoning can be difficult. Try one small pause before deciding what to do next. You can choose none of these.

My possible pause tools

- [ ] A quieter place
- [ ] A comforting object
- [ ] A sensory break
- [ ] Drawing or writing
- [ ] Movement or stretching
- [ ] Water or a snack
- [ ] Time with a trusted adult
- [ ] Being left alone briefly

Try a gentle noticing exercise

If it feels comfortable, name three things you can see. Notice their colours or shapes. You do not have to breathe in a special way or make eye contact.

What helps me feel a little safer or steadier?

What would make things worse for me?

A gentle reminder

You can ask for a pause without needing to explain everything immediately.

Communicate your way

You may use speech, gestures, drawing, writing, AAC, a message or help from someone you trust. There is no one right way to speak about feelings.

Messages I might want to use

- [ ] Please give me time
- [ ] I feel really hurt
- [ ] Can you listen?
- [ ] I need some space
- [ ] Can you explain again?
- [ ] Please stay nearby

Words, pictures or gestures that work for me:

A trusted person I could tell:

After a disagreement

A friendship repair might begin with listening, explaining your feelings or saying sorry for something specific. Both people deserve respect and kindness.

My personal support card

This card is yours. Complete only the parts you want. You can show it to a trusted adult, keep it private or change it later.

When my rejection alarm rings, you might notice...

It helps when other people...

Please try not to...

I can ask for support by...

My trusted people are...

I am more than one difficult moment

My feelings matter. I deserve friendship and kindness. I can learn new tools without changing who I am.

For the grown-ups who care

Strong rejection feelings can be exhausting for children and caregivers. The aim is not to remove every disappointment. It is to offer safety, understanding and useful support.

Connect before correcting

Use a calm tone, fewer words and enough time. Name what you notice without assuming you know exactly what the child feels.

Take real hurt seriously

Check for bullying, repeated exclusion and unfair treatment. Do not automatically label a child's experience as overreacting.

Support communication

Offer speech, pictures, writing, gestures or AAC. Ask whether the child wants listening, help solving a problem or space.

Repair after hard moments

Return when everyone is more settled. Talk about what happened, acknowledge your own mistakes and plan one next step.

Notice when extra help is needed

If distress is persistent, affects school or relationships, or creates safety concerns, consider speaking with a GP or qualified mental health professional.

This guide provides general educational wellbeing support, not a diagnosis or a replacement for professional or emergency care.