

CHAPTER 45

Coping with Rejection

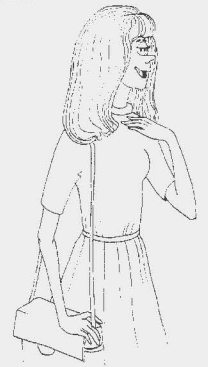
We all feel rejected at one time or another. We may be dropped from the school soccer team, or feel that people are not interested in us. All of us have to learn how to accept rejection. How well we do this will show our character and our ability to become mature.

Feeling rejected



Everyone was going to Valerka's dacha for the weekend. The sole subject of conversation was: we need to take a tape recorder, tapes, food; don't forget about swimming, etc. ... I tried not to participate in the conversations or pretended to agree with everything, but nobody invited me!

We came to the party together. I was so happy that he invited me, and I felt that at last I had a boyfriend. But soon he left me and spent the whole evening speaking to Svetka, then invited her to dance. I spent some time unnoticed in the corner and then left the party, making up some excuse. If I didn't run away in time, he would go with Svetka, leaving me alone. It would be too humiliating!

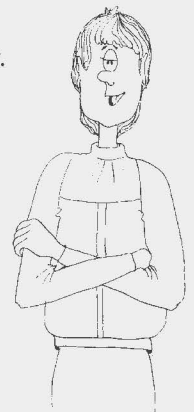


My best friend found a new set of friends. We've been friends since second grade, but now he never has time. He's always busy and never tells me with what; he's got money, girlfriends. He even forgot about my birthday.



I liked Lena for a long time. She seemed to be the most wonderful of all the girls. I simply didn't notice anybody else. I didn't know how to approach her, so finally I wrote a letter. Next day I saw how she was laughing at my letter together with her friend. I wanted to disappear. I ran up to her and grabbed the letter.

Sasha says that dad is his best friend, but my father doesn't even notice me. Once I decided to speak to him about everything, simply to have a man-to-man conversation. At first he was listening to me with a kind of curiosity, but then somebody from his office called, and at that moment he forgot about my existence and spent the whole evening speaking about his "important" things. And we never came back to our conversation.





Throughout life we are involved in relationships. Some are superficial and it doesn't matter much what such people think of us, while others are of tremendous significance. It is very important to learn how to respond to rejection.

For example, suppose a shop assistant is rude to you. There are several ways you can respond. You can take it personally and think that there is something wrong with you. If you always think this way, you will soon feel crushed. Since it is painful to accept that there is something wrong with oneself, many people build a wall to protect themselves. They then respond by attacking the other person. Alternatively you can try to imagine why the assistant is behaving in this way. Perhaps she has had a bad day. Maybe she hates her job or she just hasn't been trained properly. It's good to keep in mind that if she were happy, she would not be treating you badly. So why not try to make her smile!

When we are in love, we feel that we cannot live without our beloved. Everything this person says and does has great significance for us. When we love in this way, we open our heart, trusting this person with our deepest thoughts and feelings. In doing so we make ourselves vulnerable. The person we love the most is also the one who can hurt us the most. Thus such relationships can be the source not only of joy but also of pain. This is why the person we love the most can become the one we hate the most.

When we are rejected, we feel hurt because we are not valued. If the person we love rejects us, we feel as

though we have no value, because our sense of value and purpose in life are connected with loving that person and making him or her happy. This causes great pain. For this reason people often close their heart, deciding that they will never allow themselves to be hurt again. However, closing our heart in order to protect it from pain also prevents the heart from being touched by love. We no longer feel sad, but neither do we feel joy. This is what happens when people are depressed. They feel dead, empty and lifeless, without any real emotional connection to other people.

The healthy way to deal with rejection is to feel it—to allow oneself to be sad and to really feel the pain of loss. This does not mean wallowing in self-centered pity. Simply feeling sorry for ourselves only causes loss of hope and determination. Self-pity that results from rejection also indicates that our love was partly selfish. An unselfish person will still love even after rejection, because one cannot stop loving a person and caring about his or her well-being. Our love becomes purified. We become a deeper person with a richer character. People who have experienced tremendous suffering often have a deep heart and great wisdom and understanding.

The rejection trap

The following thoughts all derive from self-centered thinking. If you have such thoughts, you'll be stuck in a "rejection trap." So be aware of them and you'll soon see a big change in your feelings.

Religious perspective

All religions have thought very deeply about suffering and its meaning. Christians believe that when we suffer, God feels our suffering as His own. This is because we are God's children and, like any parent, God suffers when His children suffer. As well, because God has been rejected by His children, when we suffer we can understand how God suffers.

- ✘ *One failure means I'll always fail.* Of course, it doesn't. Learn to think of each situation separately, not as part of an unchangeable pattern. Everyone fails sometimes.
- ✘ *It's my fault that we broke up.* Don't blame yourself for everything. You're only 50 percent of a relationship, so you can't be 100 percent to blame.
- ✘ *She said I was stupid, so I must be.* Thinking badly of yourself won't help. Think about when it was said, how it was said and who said it.
- ✘ *What will people think?* What you think is what matters. Perhaps this is one of the hardest lessons to learn, but it's certainly one of the most important.

Anya's Story

Anya was in her tenth year at school. All the girls in her group were absorbed in love affairs, both real and imaginary. They talked of practically nothing else. Anya was almost 16 and had never been in love. At last He appeared.

Anya attended courses in painting, and in the middle of October Kostya joined their group. Anya felt at once that she had finally met the prince she had been waiting for. Kostya was only a year older, but she thought she had never seen such a wonderful, intelligent, grown-up person. He had visited every exhibition, seen every film, read every book. How could he be compared with any of the boys she knew? So of course Anya fell in love, but she would not admit it for a long time. She was naturally shy, and it had always been torture for her to talk to a boy, let alone perfection itself, as Kostya was! She was sure he would never even notice her. So at first she adored him in the privacy of her thoughts. If he occasionally talked to her, she relived the event for a week—till they met again. Fortunately, she could see him quite often, because they had classes together three times a week. Her life revolved around these three days. Anya didn't dare dream of any response to her love. Just to see him again! To offer him a good book or a good cassette (he was very fond of jazz) and hear his slightly surprised "Thank you."

But as time passed Kostya began paying more attention to Anya. It was not a personal interest; it was just because most of their fellow students were only 13 or 14 years old—no wonder he was not interested in talking with them. So, he began chatting to Anya. Although their contact was confined to the time they spent at the studio and a 15-minute walk to the Metro station, Anya was on cloud nine. She never asked herself why he did not invite her to his house or introduce her to his friends. She had been aware all along that he was too good for her and gratefully accepted any trifling signs of his attention without having any hopes for the future.

Kostya enjoyed her company when she was there. He forgot her the minute they parted at the Metro station, and did not remember her till they met at their next class. He had enough friends as it was. Girls liked him, particularly because he looked older than he really was. In his world there was no place for Anya.

Some months passed. Anya still adored Kostya, and her only dream was that their contacts would last forever. After class they would walk to the Metro together, sometimes passing the nearest station and walking on to the next one, talking about everything. She would wait for the next evening, the next meeting. But summer came, and the start of

vacation. Anya was desperate. She would not see Kostya till September. On the day of the final class they walked to the Metro, as usual. "Well, see you in September," Kostya said casually. "Till September," was all Anya could reply.

The summer seemed unbearably long. At last September came. On the first Monday Anya hurried to the course. She had with her the wonderful paintbrushes she had managed to get for



Kostya. Half the summer she had been dreaming of the moment she would give him her present. But Kostya did not come to class. Neither did he come a week or a month later. He did not phone her. At last Anya asked the teacher about Kostya. "Didn't you know? He has started preliminary courses at the art college, and he spends a lot of time studying there."

For about half a year Anya expected Kostya to remember her and phone her, at least on her birthday. Then she lost all hope. "It's all my fault. How stupid of me to have hoped for anything! It was too marvelous for me!" she thought. Still she kept suffering. She became more unsociable and shy than she had been before. "Probably love is not meant for me. I don't like the boys with whom my classmates fall in love, and the only person I could fall in love with made it clear that I didn't mean anything to him. Well, so be it!" That was the only lesson her first love taught her.

Questions for Discussion



- Why couldn't Anya discern Kostya's real attitude to her?
- Why do you think Kostya couldn't see Anya's value?
- What could Anya change in order to build their relations on the basis of mutual respect? What was Kostya's responsibility?
- What do you think were the prospects for their relationship, had Kostya kept attending the course?
- What would you advise Anya in order to help her overcome her grief?
- In what way will this incident affect Anya's relations with boys and Kostya's relations with girls?

Paul's Story

Paul and Larissa were two students at the same university. They were both away from home for the first time and were feeling a little homesick and lonely. They met at a party and were drawn to each other. They enjoyed each other's company and found their developing relationship emotionally and intellectually satisfying. They liked the same music and enjoyed doing things together. They started to spend more time with each other and less with other friends.

As time went on, they became more and more attracted to each other. One evening, overcome with romantic passion and desire, their relationship became sexual as well. There was no discussion about marriage, a question they both avoided.

After a few years, college graduation came. Larissa had grown tired of her relationship with Paul and decided after graduating to start afresh somewhere else. Just before his final exams, she told Paul she wanted to end their relationship as she was moving away and wanted to have a "new start."

Paul was devastated. It affected him badly, especially since it was just before his final exams. He felt that the most important part of himself had been rejected. His heart felt as though it would break apart. The pain was indescribable. He was fortunate, though, in having friends who supported him.

However, he was determined never to be hurt like this again. He shut his heart, and vowed that he would never trust a woman. From now on he would only use women. He could never love again.

Even though he later married, this deep pain from when he was young never healed. Although he wanted to, he could never open his heart to his wife and could never really trust her. Their relationship became hollow and empty, a loveless marriage. Even though he had children, he could never really love them wholeheartedly either. This affected his children. He never could experience the joy of that first love again.



Questions for Discussion



- Why were Paul and Larissa attracted to each other?
- What effect did sex have on their relationship?
- Why was Paul so affected by Larissa's rejection?
- Would their relationship have ended differently if they had not had sex?
- How else might Paul have responded to what had happened?
- If you were one of Paul's friends, what would you have said to him?
- Why was it so difficult for Paul to give his heart to anyone again?

For Your Journal



Think of a situation in which you felt rejected. How did you feel: unwanted, ignored, useless, unimportant, left out, a failure, hurt, resentful? Note down what you felt and what you actually did or said at the time. Did you express your feelings or not? Looking back, how well did you cope with the rejection? Do you wish you had handled things differently? If so, how? How would you cope with a similar situation in the future? Write about what happened, saying what your feelings were at the time and what your feelings are about it now.

The Date

"I could make him notice me if I wanted to!"

"Oh, sure," laughed Ira's friends, "if you wanted to! Go on, then, show us how!"

Ira put a hand behind her head and swung her hips a little. But it was not really convincing, even to her. Everyone else just groaned. "All right, maybe it's not that simple. But I still think it could be done. And I think someone ought to do it. Who does he think he is, going round with his nose in the air, as if girls just didn't exist! It's time someone taught him that you can't just ignore half the human race."

"I reckon you'd stand a better chance if you rolled yourself in mud and dressed up as a soccer ball!" joked Anya. "The thing with Ivan is, if it's not on the soccer field, he doesn't see it. His whole life revolves around sports."

"Well, it shouldn't. It would do him good to have another interest in life," said Ira.

"Oh, come on, Ira," said Maya, "you're not interested in what would do Ivan good. And you're not interested in that feminist line about ignoring half the human race. You're just annoyed because he doesn't notice you!"

"That's not it, and I'll prove it to you!" cried Ira. "Look, I'll bet you five I can get him to ask me out. And then when he does, I'll turn him down flat. That'll teach him and you what I think of him!"

The others laughed, feeling a little uncomfortable, and let the subject drop. Ira would not carry out her threat — she had only said it in the heat of the moment, and Ivan was okay, really. All right, he *was* sports mad, and his friends were all boys, but nobody really thought he looked down on girls. Ira would soon give up when she got no reaction.

But she did get a reaction. No one was quite sure how it happened, but as the weeks went by, Ivan did seem to be taking more notice of Ira. Nothing much — sometimes a grin and a wave as he came off the soccer field, sometimes checking his homework with her — *What did you put for question 3?* And certainly Ira made sure that she was always around when Ivan was doing anything interesting.



Then one day Anya came up to the others in great excitement just as they were leaving school.

“Come and watch!” she said. “I reckon Ira’s going to win her bet after all! You know she’s in that drama rehearsal, and it’s gone on a bit late? Well, I’ve just seen Ivan hanging around outside the hall. He’s trying to look like he’s not doing anything much there, and a couple of times he’s got up and begun to leave, then he sort of hesitated and turned back. You can see him from the top of the stairs. Come on!” and she ran back to her observation post.

One or two of the girls had not heard of the bet that Ira had made. When Katya heard about it, she was indignant. “That’s horrible! How could she do it?”

Leila simply said, “I could never ever do that in a million years!” and walked away down the corridor. No one could work out whether the note in her voice was envy or disgust.

“Oh, come on!” said Maya. “Haven’t you heard of the battle of the sexes? That’s what adult life is all about, and if you don’t fight for your side you’ll get beaten. Ira didn’t mean anything serious by it.”

“That’s exactly what I mean — she’s made a game of it. Maybe Ivan does think he’s the next Russian soccer star, but that’s better than making a game out of other people”.

The argument went on so long that in the end it was only Anya who saw Ivan approach Ira as she came out of the hall. It was only Anya who saw Ira hesitate briefly, then say a few words and walk away. And it was only Anya who saw the look on Ivan’s face as he ran out of the school.

But when Anya cornered Ira the next day to congratulate her on winning her bet, Ira did not seem all that interested.

“What did you say to him, Ira? You certainly taught him what’s what! He hasn’t even turned up in school today!”

“Hasn’t he?” said Ira, “I didn’t know that. But it’s nothing to do with me.”