



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
February 2025

How To Cope With Bad News

Adapted from Neel Burton M.A., M.D.

Bad news can leave us in a state of dread and despair. It seems like our whole world is falling apart, almost as if we're being driven into the ground. We fear the very worst and cannot get it out of our mind, or gut. Often there are other emotions mangled in, like anger, guilt, despair, betrayal, and love. Bad news: we've all had it, and we're all going to get it.

How To Cope With Bad News

1. Deep Breathing

Just after receiving bad news, it's very important to regain control over our emotions. Start by regulating your breathing. Breathe in deeply through your nose and hold the air in for several seconds. Then purse your lips and gradually let the air out. Let out as much air as you can. Carry on until you feel more relaxed.

2. Contextualization

Try to frame the bad news, to put it into its proper context. Think about all the good things in your life, including those that have been and those that are yet to come. Remind yourself of all the strengths and resources—the friends, facilities, and faculties—that you can draw upon in your time of need. Imagine how things could be much, much worse—and how they actually are for some people. Your house may have been burgled. Yes, you lost some valuables and it's all such a huge hassle. But you still have your health, your job, your partner.

Bad things are bound to hit us now and then, and it can only be a matter of time before they hit us again. In many cases, they are just the flip side of the good things that we enjoy. You got burgled, because you had a house and valuables. You lost a great relationship, because you had one in the first place.

3. Negative Visualization

Now focus on the bad news itself. What's the worst that could happen, and is that really all that bad? Now that you've dealt with the worst, what's the best possible outcome? And what's the most likely outcome? Imagine that someone is threatening to sue you. The worst possible outcome is that you lose the case and suffer all the entailing cost, stress, and emotional and reputational hurt. Though it's unlikely, you might even do time in prison (it has happened to some, and a few, like Bertrand Russell, did rather well out of it). But the most likely outcome is that you reach some sort of out-of-court settlement. And the best possible outcome is that you win the case, or better still, it gets dropped.

4. Transformation

Try to transform your bad news into something positive, or into something that has positive aspects. Your bad news may represent a learning or strengthening experience, or act as a wake-up call, or force you to reassess your priorities. At the very least, it offers a window into the human condition and an opportunity to exercise dignity and self-control. Maybe you lost your job: time for a holiday and a promotion, or a career change, or the freedom and fulfillment of self-employment. Maybe your partner cheated on you. Even so, you feel sure that he or she still loves you, that there is still something there. Perhaps you can even bring yourself to understand his or her motives.

Continued on the next page.



Yes, of course, it's painful, but it may also be an opportunity to forgive, to build a closer intimacy, to re-launch your relationship—or to find a more fulfilling one. You've been diagnosed with a serious medical condition. Though it's terrible news, it's also the chance to get the treatment and support that you need, to take control, to fight back, to look at life and your relationships from another, richer perspective.

5. Self-Control

Over the next hours, days, and weeks, as you take it on board and integrate it into your worldview, the bad news will begin to lose its bite. In the meanwhile, it can be tempting to distract yourself by keeping busy, to rush ahead and do everything possible to reverse or mitigate your bad luck. Beware of acting rashly, depleting your resources, and making a bad situation worse. Instead, take a step back and prioritize. Think laterally, act strategically, and keep in mind that gentle action, or even no action at all, may well be your best option. Instead of replaying the past or fretting for the future, focus on what is firmly within your control. If someone is making you suffer, think how much more they must be suffering, and try to feel their pain and understand where they're coming from.

6. Support

When we feel threatened and vulnerable, or simply overwhelmed, there's nothing more natural than to reach out to one or several others for advice, perspective, and reassurance, or just for a hand to squeeze. But it's important to go to the right person, someone who will know how to listen and how to respond, and who won't just make things worse. If you can't find anyone suitable, or you're after something more structured, you can seek out professional support from a counselor, pastor, or doctor, or call one of several helplines. If you turn to the Internet for information and support, beware of unverified web pages and open chat rooms. Being with others can help us to work through our thoughts and feelings and regain calm and perspective. Other activities that can help with this include spending time in nature and enjoying or engaging in art, including writing, painting, and music.

7. Physical Well-Being

Calm and perspective depend upon mental well-being, which in turn depends, to a large extent, upon physical well-being. Be kind to yourself.

In particular, make sure that you get enough sleep and exercise, while also avoiding numbing behaviors, such as binge drinking and drug-taking. With regard to psychological health, exercise—even mild exercise, such as walking or gardening—decreases stress, improves concentration and memory, boosts self-esteem, and directly lifts mood through the release of natural antidepressants called endorphins.

Other ways to give your endorphins a boost include: holding someone's hand, giving and receiving massage, having a hot bath, laughing, singing, lighting a scented candle, and enjoying a delicious meal.

When things don't go as planned, instead of getting discouraged, look for lessons in these experiences. Understanding what didn't work and why can be invaluable for future success.

First Choice Health EAP Provides Support

We understand that receiving bad news can be stressful and overwhelming. If you need help navigating and coping with bad news, remember that First Choice Health EAP licensed clinical staff are here to provide support.

Call us at (800) 777-4114 or visit www.FirstChoiceEAP.com to request a referral or learn more about your EAP. Your EAP sessions are **confidential** and **available 24/7**.

References:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-seek/201804/how-to-cope-with-bad-news>