

People bouncing back

KEY MESSAGES

Even after difficult times, people can bounce back, just like balls and nature bounce back.

When a ball hits the ground, it is temporarily pushed out of shape, then it bounces back and returns to its original shape. When an area of bushland is burnt, much of it can regenerate and bounce back too. These metaphors help explain that when you encounter difficult times in your life that make you feel sad, worried or unhappy, you too can try to bounce back to what you were like before. Often, after you have bounced back, you are even stronger than you were before.

Bad times don't last. Things always get better. Stay optimistic.

Bad times and bad feelings are nearly always temporary. Sometimes it takes a while for a difficult situation to improve, but things will get better. Either the situation improves or you find a way to cope with it. When you are having an unhappy time in part of your life, just try to get through one day at a time. Expecting that things will get better can help you to cope with difficult times.

Other people can help if you talk to them. Get a reality check.

Talking to other people when you have bad times and feel unhappy or worried will help you to bounce back. Choose someone you feel that you can trust. When you talk to someone else about a problem, you get a reality check. They will tell you their view on your problem and may give you other ideas or information. They will also help you and care about you. Talking to someone about your troubles sometimes takes courage, and it is a sign of strength.

Unhelpful thinking makes you feel more upset. Think again.

Helpful thinking is sensible thinking based on facts. It can make you feel calmer and more hopeful about things. Helpful thinking is based on reality checking, for example:

- getting another opinion
- checking facts
- sticking to the facts
- testing things out.

Unhelpful thinking makes you feel more upset and reduces hope. Unhelpful thinking is:

- jumping to conclusions and making assumptions
- trying to read other people's minds
- exaggerating
- generalising
- panicking.

It can even be thinking that things are simpler than they really are. Changing unhelpful thinking to helpful thinking makes you feel better, helps you to cope and helps you to make better decisions in your life.

Nobody is perfect – not you and not others.

Everyone makes mistakes, forgets things, fails at some things and is thoughtless at times. It is normal. We are all people just doing our best, and we all have our weaknesses. There is no such thing as a perfect person.

If you expect yourself to be perfect, you will be too self-critical. If you expect others to be perfect and never make a mistake, you will be too critical of them. Then you run the risk of people not liking you. However, even though perfection is not an option, it is still possible to improve yourself and have high standards.

Concentrate on the positives (no matter how small) and use laughter.

Concentrate on whatever positive aspects you can find in an unhappy or worrying situation, even though they may be small. Try to see any small funny side of a situation.

Looking at the positives and laughter are things to hang on to when a situation is not good. They won't magically make your problems go away, but they will help you feel a little better. You will also feel more hopeful about finding solutions and handling things.

(Note: Classroom activities based on this point are in Unit 8: Humour and Unit 5: Looking on the bright side.)

Everybody experiences sadness, hurt, failure, rejection and setbacks sometimes, not just you. They are a normal part of life. Try not to personalise them.

It is normal to have painful, worrying and distressing times in your life sometimes. Unhappy things happen to everyone at times, even though at the time you may feel like they happen only to you. If you think incorrectly that you are especially unlucky, hard-done-by or jinxed, you will be less able to bounce back. Try to normalise these things, which means to see them as normal parts of life that happen to lots of other people. Don't personalise them, which means don't view them as happening only to you.

Blame fairly. How much of what happened was due to you, to others and to bad luck or circumstances?

When something bad happens, be fair to yourself and other people when you are trying to explain how it happened. Things usually happen as a result of a combination of three things:

- what you did (or didn't do)
- what other people did (or didn't do)
- bad luck or circumstances beyond your control.

Try to work out how much of what happened was a result of each of these three factors.

Accept what can't be changed (but try to change what you can change first).

Do your best to keep trying to solve problems and change things you don't like in your life. But also know when it is time to accept that you can't change things. Sometimes you can't change a situation (e.g. when a friend moves or parents separate) because it is not under your control. There is no point in getting upset over what you can't change. Getting upset won't make any difference to the situation. Just say to yourself, 'That's the way things are and I will just have to deal with it.' If something has already happened and can't be changed, say to yourself, 'What's done is done and can't be undone. I will have to live with it.'

Catastrophising exaggerates your worries. Don't believe the worst possible picture.

'Catastrophising' means thinking about the worst thing that could happen in a situation and then assuming that it will happen. Don't panic and make yourself miserable over something that may never happen. Get a reality check.

Keep things in perspective. It's only one part of your life.

Bad times usually happen in only one part of your life. They do not have to spoil other things in your life. Try to keep things in perspective. You may have a problem with a friend, but your family life is still fine, you're doing really well at school and your sports team is playing well. Bad times are like a few threads in a jumper that have come loose: the whole jumper hasn't fallen apart.

? Learning objectives

In this unit, students will further extend and apply their understanding of:

- the differences between helpful and unhelpful thinking
- strategies for managing normal but challenging changes, setbacks and difficult times in their life
- the importance of optimistic thinking.

Resources list



A complete list of resources including references for core and additional books, films, video clips, poems, songs and websites is available.

Life has ups and downs but you can bounce back

Resources



◆ Books

Oh, the Places You'll Go!

With the message that everyone is responsible for the decisions they make throughout their lives, this book is essential to use in the program. It conveys that while life contains great joy and success, sometimes you will also be lonely, lost, scared and sad.

The Peasant Prince

This picture book tells the true story of 'Mao's Last Dancer' (Li Cunxin), who followed his dreams from a poor village in China to the world ballet stage. Along the way he had to deal with separation from his parents at the age of 11, intense loneliness and adapting to new places.

Long Walk to Freedom

This is the story of Nelson Mandela, who, as a young boy, was determined to fight for the rights of people in South Africa. It tells of his struggles as a man who believed in equality for all people, whatever the colour of their skin.



◆ Film

My Dog Skip

In this story, set in 1942, a young boy's relationship with his dog reflects some of his painful experiences of growing up.



◆ Songs

'Bounce Back - Rap'

'Bounce Back Wriggle Jive'

'When You Fall Down, Just Pick Yourself Up'

◆ Poem

Mending



Circle Time or classroom discussion

Read *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* Use the Inside–outside circle strategy (see page 94) to enable students to discuss the book with different partners. Use the following three questions (one with each partner). Ask students to sit back in the circle after the activity and share what they discussed for each question, checking they cover the answers below.

- 1 *What are Dr Seuss's messages about life?* (Life has its ups and downs; everybody will meet obstacles, i.e. experience setbacks and make mistakes along the way; persevere and don't give up, stay optimistic; your life journey will mostly be wonderful.)

- 2 *What is one strength you have and why is it important to know your strengths? (e.g. good at drawing, maths, reading, composing songs, surfing/playing football. Doing something you are good at can help you to get through a difficult time.)*
- 3 *How do you 'unslump' yourself when things go wrong in your day? What are good ways of dealing with changing a bad mood into a good mood? (e.g. going for a walk, riding a bike, listening to music, talking to someone etc.)*

Discussion questions

- What are some of the obstacles/problems the character met in the book? (Bad weather, enemies, scary things, tiredness (sore arms) and resources that let him down (leaky sneakers).)
- Does he give up or persevere?
- What are the kinds of obstacles that people your age face (e.g. at school, with schoolwork, in the playground, family, sport)?
- What are some of the great places which you might choose to go to? (Stress that the 'places' are not just geographical locations, but include successes, achievements, friendships, love etc.)
- How does Dr Seuss express:
 - the things you or people your age have to wait for?
 - that you have choices, but it's helpful to know what you want to achieve so you can set a goal?
 - that you'll grow and become stronger after bad times?
 - that everyone will experience loneliness sometimes?
 - that sometimes you'll be your own worst enemy?
- What are some of the 'streets' you wouldn't choose to go to? (e.g. antisocial behaviours, behaving without self-respect, drug taking, bullying, unkindness, greed.)
- Why is it important to know your strengths? (Your strengths help you to decide on some of the directions you will take on your journey; doing something where you need to use one of your strengths can help you to get through difficult times.)
- What does resilience mean? (It means the capacity to bounce back, although it's sometimes not easy.)
- Some people describe life as a balancing act. What does that mean?
- Which part of the book best reflects how you are currently feeling?



Read one of the other resources or show the film. Then explain the **BOUNCE BACK!** acronym using the **BOUNCE BACK! e-tool** and/or **BLM Bounce Back! Poster**. It tells how people can bounce back and cope with their lives, and how they can make their lives even better. Unpack any new or unfamiliar vocabulary. It is important that students are regularly exposed to the acronym and learn the statements. By doing this they are more likely to remember them for the rest of their lives.

Teacher reflection

Which two of the **BOUNCE BACK!** statements would you find most helpful when you have a setback? Consider making your own desktop bounce-backer with a photo of yourself. It can serve as a useful visual prompt for you too and it will encourage students to use their own bounce-backer as a prompt for coping. When you have a setback show the class how you try to push it over (gently) but it always 'bounces back'.



Activities

- ▶ Each student develops a page for a class book (see page 104) for the key message: ‘Life has some ups and downs but you can bounce back’. Alternatively, each student chooses a quote from *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!* and illustrates it.
- ▶ Create a class collage with illustrations of hot air balloons and a student’s face in each balloon with speech bubbles indicating one major goal they have. Emphasise that goals can be behavioural.
- ▶ Students write a story or create a painting entitled ‘Life’s a great balancing act!’ or ‘Life has its ups and downs’. Alternatively students make a model of a person balancing on a tightrope or a seesaw. This activity links with the Technology curriculum.

Make a bounce-backer

Students make a bounce-backer (see page 103) – a powerful metaphor for how individuals can be knocked down and yet bounce back when they are struggling or have a problem they are dealing with. Discuss what makes the bounce-backer bounce back. Gravity gives it the ‘go’ (i.e. the energy to bounce back). What happens if there is no weight in the bottom of the bounce-backer? What happens if the head is too heavy? Make the link between how the bounce-backer bounces back and returns to where it started, even after being pushed over, and how we can ‘bounce back’ after we have had an experience that ‘knocks us over’.

This is a good peer support activity for older students to work with their younger buddy.

Working with younger students

- Students interview a younger student about what they like doing (e.g. playing sport, reading, playing with friends) and then write a story about how the younger student bounced back from a setback they had when participating in their favourite activity.
- Students learn the simple ‘Song for Children’ about bouncing back and then perform and teach it for younger students.

Biographical book analysis

Read one of the suggested books about Nelson Mandela or Li Cunxin (page 142) to the whole class, or they can be read by individual students. Students can then use an interactive bio-cube (see the **Resources list**) to record the biographical details of Nelson Mandela or Li Cunxin in a way that highlights their resilience.



eBook

Take-home task

Encourage students to take the BOUNCE BACK! statements home and talk to their families about what the statements mean and how the statements can help everyone to bounce back when they make a mistake or feel unhappy. Students can make a **Bounce Back!** fridge magnet frame (see page 105) to take home to teach the whole family the BOUNCE BACK! coping statements.

Embed it

BOUNCE BACK! acronym

The BOUNCE BACK! acronym can become the language of resilience across the school. Challenge your students’ unhelpful thinking. Use teachable moments to reinforce the BOUNCE BACK! statements when children experience setbacks to help them get through. Use the **Bounce Back!** literature prompts on page 86 to discuss classroom situations, books, videos, events in the media etc. Choose books that help to reinforce the **Bounce Back!** messages.

Teachers on yard duty take a BOUNCE BACK! card containing the acronym as a focus for discussing playground issues that arise.

Bounce Back! journal

Build time into **Bounce Back!** sessions for students to record their reflections. What did they learn? How can they put these 'life' lessons into practice?

Bad times don't last, things always get better - stay optimistic

Resources



◆ Books

Flood/Fire/Cyclone

These three picture books were inspired by real Australian natural disasters and capture the devastation caused. They all encapsulate the **Bounce Back!** message that bad times don't last and things always get better, and focus on community support and the kindness of strangers.

Lost! A True Tale from the Bush

In 1864, the three Duff children (aged three to nine) became lost in the Australian bush during a very cold winter. They managed to survive for nine days in the desolate scrub of the Wimmera region of western Victoria with no food and very little water, trekking for nearly 100 kilometres.

The City

A woman from the city decided to protect her son from the terrible things that can happen in life, and moved them away to the country. After her death, her adult son thinks he can't survive without her, but he discovers that the city is an exciting place where he can cope on his own.



◆ Video clip

Behind the News: Bushfire Aid

In February, 2017, more than 50 homes were destroyed and many kids evacuated after fires ripped through NSW and the ACT. The video clip interviews students from Beechwood Public School.



Circle Time or classroom discussion



Read one of the books or show the video clip, and discuss. Use the **BOUNCE BACK! e-tool** or **BLM BOUNCE BACK! Poster** and refer to the first BOUNCE BACK! statement: 'Bad times don't last. Things always get better. Stay optimistic.'

Discussion questions

- What was the bad time or bad thing that happened in the story?
- How did the character feel about this bad time?
- Did it take a long time for things to get better?
- What might happen if you only focus on the bad time and what you have lost? (You continue to feel sad, depressed, unhappy.)
- What is optimism? (The belief that things are more likely to turn out well.)
- What is pessimism? (The belief that things are more likely to turn out badly.)

- What were the small positives in a bad situation that helped people be optimistic that things would get better?
- How would optimism help you to bounce back from a difficult situation? (You don't feel so sad or worried, it gives you hope, it keeps you trying to solve a problem.)
- How would pessimism make things worse? (You feel bad, you give up.)
- Can you change the way you think to become more optimistic? (Yes – see the Key messages, page 140, and the BOUNCE BACK! acronym.)
- Have you ever been in a situation you didn't like and thought it would never improve but it did? (Bad times are usually temporary.)
- Why don't bad times last? (Because situations change, time makes things seem less awful, other people help along the way, time helps you to see things more in perspective, more ways to solve the problem occur to you.)
- When might it be hard to be optimistic?
- Can you be too optimistic? (Yes: blind faith – a belief in something without checking the facts – can be dangerous. You need to do a reality check.)

Ask students to turn to a partner and each talk about a bad time they experienced that didn't last and eventually went away. Ask some students to share with the class and emphasise that at the time they probably felt sad and unhappy, but eventually things did get better. Remind them not to disclose too much information.



Activities

- ▶ In groups, students produce a book/film review or digital book/film trailer (see page 104) on a book or film about how people bounce back. They highlight how 'Bad times don't last.'
- ▶ Students work in pairs to compare two of the books. They can focus on the similarities and differences between the messages of hope.
- ▶ Students make a fridge magnet (see page 105) with the phrase 'Bad times don't last.'

Survival pack

Many children in Australia have had to flee from natural disasters threatening their home, such as bushfires or floods. Discuss how some people have to evacuate their homes and find shelter (stay with family and friends, go to a relief centre). Ask students what would they put in a survival pack? (e.g. food, photos, warm clothes, water, games etc.) How would a survival pack help them emotionally to get through a difficult time? Students create a 'Survival pack' poster with illustrations and labels of items they think they would need to get through a difficult time if they had to flee their homes.