When Someone Disappoints You

RELATIONSHIPS & EMOTIONS

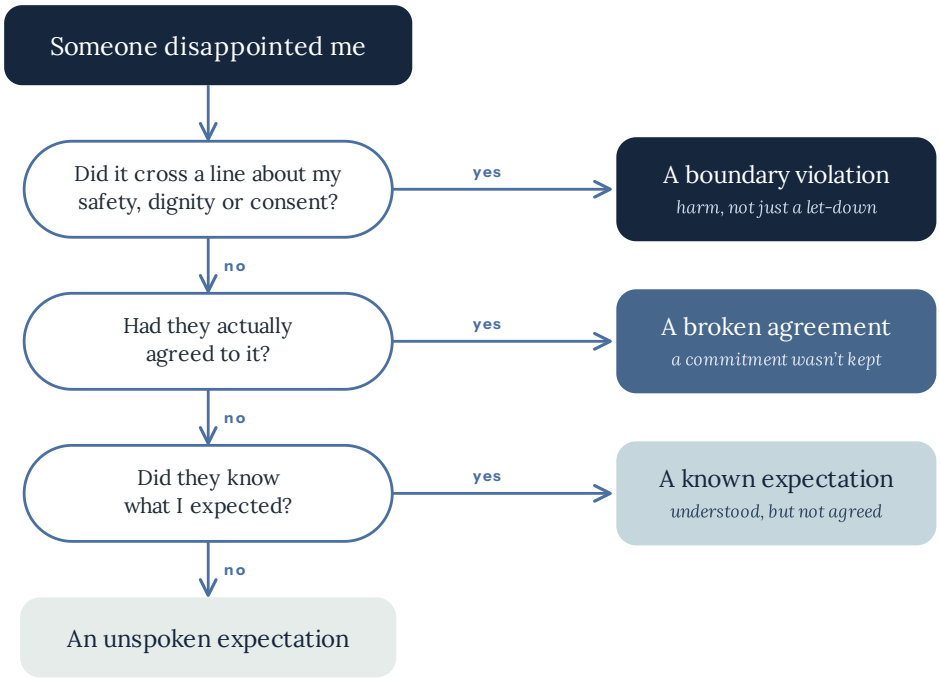
Expectations, hurt and resentment: understanding what happened, and what to do next

Disappointment lives in the gap between what we expected and what actually happened. How much it hurts often reflects how much something mattered to us, not that we are being unreasonable. This form helps you tell apart an unspoken expectation, a known expectation, a broken agreement and a boundary violation, without automatically blaming yourself or the other person.

ASK THESE IN ORDER

Start at the top. Each answer points to a different kind of hurt, and a different next step.

If more than one fits, go with the first "yes".



01 Different kinds of hurt

and what each may call for

Unspoken expectation

I hoped for or assumed something, but never said it.

May call for: reflection, or saying it next time

Known expectation

They knew what I wanted, but never agreed to it.

May call for: a conversation, or acceptance

Broken agreement

They agreed to something, then didn't follow through.

May call for: a conversation and repair

Boundary violation

It harmed my safety, dignity or consent.

May call for: a boundary, support, or a change

02 Disappointment or betrayal?

both hurt, in different ways

Disappointment

- Something I hoped for didn't happen
- Often about limits, mistakes or different priorities
- Trust may be dented, but is usually intact
- Can feel like: sadness, frustration, being let down

Betrayal

- Trust I relied on was knowingly broken
- Often involves deception or a serious broken commitment
- Can shake how I see the whole relationship
- Can feel like: shock, hurt, anger, disorientation

03 What might my resentment be signalling?

resentment often points to something that matters

"That wasn't fair."
a sense of injustice or imbalance

"I keep giving more."
effort or care that isn't returned

"I never said no."
a limit I didn't voice, or that wasn't heard

"I matter too."
a need for recognition or respect

"I'm still hurt."
pain that hasn't been acknowledged

"Something has to change."
a pattern, not a one-off

Anger and resentment can be secondary feelings that cover more vulnerable ones, such as hurt or fear. They can also be primary, healthy responses to being treated unfairly (Greenberg, 2004). Either way, they are worth listening to.

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04 What did I expect, and why?

naming it clearly helps

What I expected

Where the expectation came from

- ☐ What they said or promised
- ☐ What I would have done
- ☐ What I needed at the time
- ☐ What they usually do
- ☐ What most people would do
- ☐ Not sure

05 Was it communicated, or agreed?

tick the closest

DID I COMMUNICATE IT?

- ☐ Clearly, in words
- ☐ Assumed they'd know
- ☐ Hinted at it
- ☐ Not at all

DID THEY AGREE TO IT?

- ☐ Yes, clearly
- ☐ No
- ☐ Partly, or vaguely
- ☐ Not sure

If an agreement was broken: what exactly was agreed, and what happened instead?

06 Check the facts

separating what happened from the story

In dialectical behaviour therapy, checking whether an emotion and its strength fit the facts is one way to change it (Linehan, 2015).

What actually happened
what someone else could have seen or heard

What I told myself it meant
about them, me or the relationship

Other possible explanations

How much it hurts (0–10), and why

07 What do I need now?

tick one or more

- ☐ **Acceptance**
  letting go of an expectation that may not fit this person
- ☐ **A conversation**
  saying what I expected, and listening to them
- ☐ **A boundary**
  what I will and won't accept from here
- ☐ **A change in the relationship**
  more distance, a different role, or ending it

In one study of newlyweds, positive expectations went with more stable satisfaction when partners had good relationship skills, but with steeper declines when those skills were lacking (McNulty & Karney, 2004). Expectations tend to work best when they fit what a relationship can realistically offer. Adjusting an expectation is not the same as accepting mistreatment.

08 Reflection

in my own words

What this disappointment tells me matters to me

Something I want to remember

SOURCES

Greenberg, L. S. (2004). Emotion-focused therapy. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy, 11*(1), 3–16.

Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

McNulty, J. K., & Karney, B. R. (2004). Positive expectations in the early years of marriage: Should couples expect the best or brace for the worst? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 86*(5), 729–743.

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