

WHEN HOME LIFE IS HARD

Everyone's home life is different, and no one's is perfect. Growing up isn't easy and feeling sad or uncomfortable at home can add stress to other challenges you might be facing, like troubles with school and friends. Maybe you're even feeling guilty for feeling this way because you suspect that some of your peers "have it worse." But that doesn't make your challenges any less big to *you*, and you're the one who has to deal with them. No matter what's making life difficult at home for you right now, your feelings about it are valid.



THINGS YOUNG PEOPLE STRUGGLE WITH AT HOME

Conflict with parents

You may find yourself butting heads with your parents as you try to gain more independence. Or maybe you feel like they just don't understand you. Adults and young people have different priorities, so what's important to your parents might not make sense to you, and vice versa. And while some parts of growing up never change, there are many things about your youth that are very different from when your parents were young. There might be cultural differences at play too – depending on if and when your parents came to the U.S. from another country, you might be having an American childhood that is totally unfamiliar to them.

Too many responsibilities

Depending on interests, family relationships, and privilege, you and your peers likely have lots of different responsibilities. Maybe it's a vigorous schedule of sports and other extracurriculars, or it could be having to take care of chores and siblings while working part-time – or trying to balance all of the above. When you have more responsibilities than your friends, it can seem unfair and leave you feeling like you are missing out on the fun social things other people your age are doing or desperate for some downtime for yourself – which are valid feelings.

Unaccepting family members

Unfortunately, too many young people live with parents and families that aren't accepting of who they are. Whether it's because of your sexuality, gender expression, interests, style, or something else, feeling like your family doesn't love the *real you* is painful. This often means you can't talk to your parents or siblings about the challenges you face in your day-to-day life, and you may even feel like who you are is wrong. In some cases, this can escalate to bullying, verbal and emotional abuse, or even physical abuse.

Life circumstances

Sometimes young people have very adult problems. When your family is having money trouble, you don't have enough food, you don't have a stable place to live, or a family member has health issues, you may find that you're constantly worried. Being on high alert all the time is exhausting and can take a toll on your mental health. Maybe your family looks different than the "mom, dad, kids" stereotype. Having a different living situation or family structure than your peers can bring up feelings of stress, anxiety, shame, or uncertainty. It's important to remember that families can be made up of relatives, friends, and any other caregiver.

Abuse

Child abuse is when someone who is supposed to take care of you intentionally hurts you physically, sexually, or emotionally. It can be hard to recognize abuse because it's natural to trust that the people who are supposed to care for you wouldn't hurt you. If you feel scared or unsafe at home, you might be experiencing some form of abuse. No matter what, abuse is never your fault, and you deserve to feel safe around the people in your life. The safest thing you can do if you're being hurt (or are scared you will be hurt) by someone in your life is to talk to a trusted adult outside of your home. Learn more at mhanational.org/understanding-abuse.

YOU AREN'T ALONE



Twenty-three percent of people under the age of 18 in the U.S. live with one parent and no other adults at home.¹

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were already an estimated 5.4 million children and adolescents in the U.S. providing care to another family member.²

Sixteen percent of all children nationwide are living in poverty. Poverty rates are disproportionately high for youth of color – Black (28%), Indigenous (25%), and Latinx (23%) youth are more likely to grow up poor than white (10%) and Asian American/Pacific Islander (9%) peers.³

Twenty-eight percent of LGBTQ+ youth report having experienced homelessness or housing instability at some point in their lives.⁴

COPING WITH A TOUGH HOME LIFE

Find another space

It's important to have a space – in addition to school – where you can get away from the stress of being at home. This might be a physical space that you feel good in and can go to when needed, like a friend's house, library, or local park. You can also find this safety in social connections or groups through clubs, teams, volunteering, or places of worship.

Look for small solutions

Sometimes we can't fix the main problem, but there's often a way to make some progress. If you keep missing out on plans because you need to watch your sibling, talk to your parents to see if a family member or neighbor can do it, or if your sibling can go to a friend's house so that you have some free time. If you don't have enough to eat or a stable place to live, talk to a trusted teacher, coach, or your school counselor about resources that might be available for your family through school or the community. No matter what challenges you're facing, it can be useful to write down who is in your circle of support so that you know who is there to help you when you need it.

Talk to your parents

It's easy to forget that your parents are just people, too. They may be unsure how to interact with you, especially if you're their oldest or only child. Let them know what you want – to spend more time together, to have more conversations, to hear more about their experiences growing up. Share a bit about your life with them. This will only help so much if your parents are the biggest part of the problem, but if you think their hearts are in the right place, it's worth a try.

Identify a safe adult

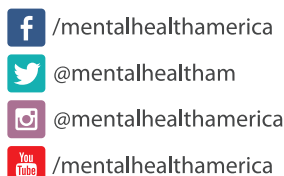
Unfortunately, not everyone who becomes a parent is ready for that kind of commitment and responsibility to their child(ren). You deserve to have a safe person to look up to in your life. If it isn't your biological parent or guardian, look to other adults, like grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, or coaches for support.

It's normal for growing up to cause challenges between parents and children, and lots of families go through challenging times.

If you're struggling with a lot of stress, hopelessness, or loneliness, visit mhascreening.org and take a screen to see if you might be dealing with symptoms of a mental health condition. Based on your confidential results, you'll get resources and tips to help you out.

IN CRISIS?

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org. You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting MHA to 741741.



SOURCES

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/12/12/religion-and-living-arrangements-around-the-world/>
² <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/sop2.14>
³ <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html>
⁴ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/>