

Coping with poor year-end results

Many students will have to address the disappointing reality that they did not do as well as they hoped this year, as public and private higher education institutions release their results this week.



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For some, this will be their first real test as an adult. However, if handled correctly, disappointing results could lead to a new and more successful path, as well as an opportunity to learn valuable life-skills, says Dr Felicity Coughlan, Director of The Independent Institute of Education.

"Disappointment is a complex human emotion, as sometimes it is the shattering of a belief that was never realistic in the first place. It could signal the final tumbling of a dream or it could simply be an obstacle along a planned path.

"Like most things in life that feel really difficult as they happen, the extent to which disappointing academic results are life-changing will depend largely on an individual's reaction. Although it is too late to change what has happened, an honest assessment of what went wrong and taking appropriate action can be the start of great new things.

"After honest introspection, students may realise that they didn't take their studies seriously enough, or, as often happens, they may have to face the fact that there has been a mismatch between their expectations and aspirations and the actual opportunities.

"Sometimes a student would've chosen a course in line with someone else's dream or tackled something out of obligation rather than inspiration. For some, their first year of studies may just have been a case of too much, too soon.

"You will recall your parents telling you as a child that life is not fair. In everyone's life there will come a time when something does not go your way. So now is the time to see for yourself that there really is depth in the cliché that says it does not matter how often you fall down - only how often you stand up. Disappointment and all its associated emotions of embarrassment, self-doubt, regret and anxiety are not pleasant. However, it is from this space where one has the opportunity to build real strength of character and embark on a new path.

"What feels huge today will only be huge in five years' time if you don't actively make it smaller now, by making new decisions based on better information."

Steps forward

1. **Analyse and be brutally honest** - Think about your choices. Whose dream are you living? What are you good at and what not so much? Figure out what you could have done differently and where things went wrong.
2. **Look at your options and then act** - The insights you get from thinking about the questions above will help you to determine how to proceed. If you have disappointed yourself but really could not have worked harder or the course simply did not gel, you are setting yourself up for another failure if you decide to give it another go.
3. If you could have done more, sought additional help or focused differently, and if the course is in line with your passion and aspirations, then you have to **consider the options available to you**, including considering different courses in a similar field at other institutions, where the style of tuition and support may be more appropriate for you.

"If you do your homework, you will find that although your options may be limited, they are certainly not eliminated.

"There are always options which could help you turn your disappointment into a life lesson rather than a lifelong hurdle. Remember that South Africa has only one quality assurance and regulatory system and therefore options you did not consider or know of last year may well be worth a second look. Speak to the student support and careers centres at various institutions about what is possible and how to achieve it.

"Finally, remember that you are not alone in your disappointment. You will be surprised how many people have faced this feeling and have risen to flourish. Share what you feel and you will almost inevitably find someone who really does get it who can help you refocus," concludes Coughlan.