

What to Do When You're



Cranky & Blue

a guide
for kids

free spirit
PUBLISHING®

James J. Crist, Ph.D.

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The concepts, ideas, procedures, and suggestions contained in this book are not intended as a substitute for professional help or therapy.

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to all the young people I've worked with who have struggled with cranky and blue feelings, or depression, and have learned to overcome them. I also dedicate it to my family members and friends who have dealt with depression. I admire your ability to keep going even at times when it seemed too much to bear.

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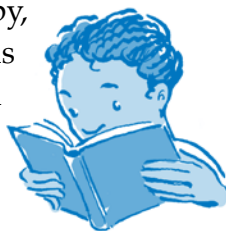
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Introduction

This book is all about feeling grumpy, sad, or down—feelings that *all* kids have sometimes. Who wouldn't feel cranky or blue if their best friend moved away, or if they were being teased or bullied in school? But this doesn't mean the feelings are easy to handle, especially on your own. And that's partly why I wrote this book.



I'm a psychologist, and I've talked with many kids who had problems with grumpy, sad, and lonely feelings. They told me how their feelings made it hard for them to eat, sleep, or get along with people at home and at school. I helped these kids better understand what's going on in their lives and find healthy ways to deal with their feelings. In this book, you'll learn about some of the ideas that worked for them.

But for some kids, feelings of crankiness and sadness go very deep. They may be grieving because a loved one died, or they may be trying to understand why their parents got a divorce. (*Grieving* means being really sad about a loss or a difficult event.) Feelings of sadness and loneliness that don't go away can be signs of grief.

They may also be symptoms of *depression*, an illness you'll learn more about in chapters 6 and 7. Depression is a serious problem for a growing number of kids today—another reason why I wrote this book. Whether you feel sad and alone some of the time, most of the time, or all of the time, this book can help.

In this book, you'll learn about the signs of being cranky or blue and what these feelings might be telling you. More important, you'll find out what you can do to help yourself feel better. You'll also discover ways to feel less down or lonely and more connected to other people in your life.

You don't have to handle grumpy, sad, or lonesome feelings all by yourself (in fact, it's much healthier to talk about them). I encourage you to read this book with someone at home who takes care of you: a family grown-up such as a parent or step-parent, a foster parent, a guardian, a grandparent, or an aunt or uncle. The "Note to Grown-Ups" on pages 113–120 offers tips for adults who take care of you. Be sure to show this special section to your adult helper.

You may also need the guidance of an adult who specializes in treating kids who have problems with feeling sad and lonely—for example a counselor, psychologist, child psychiatrist, social worker, therapist, or doctor. That may seem scary to think about, but experts like these can really help. If you're wondering what it's like to get counseling, see chapter 10.

There are many other people out there who can help you as well. You might talk to your teacher, an adult neighbor you trust, or someone at your place of worship. If you want, you can talk to people your own age, too.



Sneak Preview (What's Inside This Book)

Part 1 of *What to Do When You're Cranky & Blue* focuses on grumpy or “down” feelings that most kids have at one time or another.

- **Chapter 1** discusses the big and small things that often make kids feel cranky, lonely, or “down in the dumps.” It also talks about how different people react to these painful feelings.
- **Chapter 2** has ten “Blues Busters,” or coping skills you can try at home, at school, or anywhere else to help shake those sad feelings.
- **Chapter 3** offers written exercises that can go deeper than the Blues Busters in helping you get a handle on your feelings.
- **Chapter 4** is all about making—and keeping—friends. It includes ideas on choosing friends and describes the skills needed to be a good friend. Making connections with others is one of the best ways to get over the blues quicker.

Part 2 focuses on deeper feelings of sadness and loneliness—ones that are too hard to handle alone. If you have some of the problems described in chapters 5–9, please talk to a family adult right away. You may need the help of a counselor or doctor who can identify your problem and suggest solutions.

- **Chapter 5** is about **grief**, a deep feeling of sadness that occurs when something terrible has happened in your life such as losing a loved one or a pet, or if other sudden changes have occurred.
- **Chapter 6** talks about **depression**—when you feel cranky, blue, lonely, and unable to do much. (But the good news is you *can* do something about it.)
- **Chapter 7** discusses a specific kind of depression known as **bipolar disorder**. Bipolar disorder makes you feel really up sometimes and really down at others (kind of like a roller coaster).
- **Chapter 8** talks about some other big problems that can be connected to feelings of long-term unhappiness or depression. You'll learn about bullying, eating disorders, drug and alcohol use, and neglect and abuse, and find ways to get the right kind of help.
- **Chapter 9** talks about feeling like you no longer want to live, also known as **suicidal feelings**. Even if you've felt this way for only a minute, it's important to talk to someone. If you feel this

way now or have often wished you could die, please get some help right now. Talk to an adult you trust, and don't wait. For suicide hotlines, turn to page 103.

- **Chapter 10** describes what it's like to go to counseling. If you're having a very hard time getting over your cranky and blue feelings, or if you have problems that are too big to handle on your own, you'll learn how an expert can help.

It may help to know that many kids and adults have overcome their cranky, sad, or lonely feelings by using ideas like the ones in this book, and *you* can, too. It may take some practice, but it will be worth it.

I'd like to know how this book has helped you and how you're coping with your feelings. You can also write to me if you have questions or a problem that you don't know how to handle.

You can email me at help4kids@freespirit.com or send me a letter care of:

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Be sure to send me your address, so I can write back to you. I look forward to hearing from you!

Dr. James J. Crist



Part 1

Getting to Know
Your Cranky and
Blue Feelings

Chapter 1

What It's Like to Feel Cranky and Blue

Kareem, age eleven, feels lonely since his family moved to a new neighborhood. He can't find any kids around who are his age. At his old house, his best friend lived right across the street, so he always had someone to play action figures or ride bikes with. Now no one is around except his younger brother.



Charlotte, age ten, doesn't have friends at school anymore. The group of girls she always hung out with suddenly "dropped" her a few weeks ago. They won't talk to her in the halls and they ignore her on the bus. She can't figure out what she did wrong and she's feeling pretty low. Charlotte wonders if she should try to make new friends—but it seems so hard to do. And what if her new friends drop her, too? It hurts to be treated that way. So, she eats by herself in the cafeteria and watches while the other kids play at recess. She's just too sad to join in. And she comes home feeling cranky, which makes it hard to get along with her family.

Everyone feels cranky and blue sometimes. These feelings are a normal part of life for kids and grown-ups, but that doesn't mean they're easy to deal with. It can be hard to cheer up when you feel down. You wonder if you'll ever feel good again.

Lots of things can make you feel sad. Big changes—like moving to a new city or your parents getting divorced—can lead to many feelings, including sadness and loneliness. But other things can also bring you down, such as losing a favorite CD or fighting with a good friend. Maybe you feel sad because someone you care about is feeling blue or having other problems.

Sometimes when you're sad, you might also feel cranky. When you feel cranky, nothing seems to make you happy and every little thing seems to upset you. You might feel lonely, too. You might wish you could be around others—or feel like you



don't have anyone to be close to. If you're staying in your room and not coming out to play, you probably feel lonely. Sometimes, you can feel lonely even when you are around others. Suppose you're in the school lunchroom and other kids are having fun, but they aren't including you. Even sitting next to them, you might feel left out and alone.

Here are some things that often make kids feel sad, cranky, lonely, or blue.

Everyday things:

- not seeing enough of their mom or dad or others they care about
- being teased or bullied by other kids
- getting a bad grade on a test or an assignment
- having a disability that keeps them from doing things they want to do
- getting in a fight with a friend
- not making the basketball team or getting a part in the school play
- being bored
- gray and rainy weather

Big events:

- moving away from friends and family
- parents separating or getting divorced

- being mistreated by parents or other family grown-ups
- having a pet or family member die

Other times, kids—and grown-ups, too—feel sad without knowing why. You might wake up one day feeling blue, even though you can't think of a reason why. It's normal to feel this way from time to time. Usually, the sad feelings go away after a while.

How People Act When They're Blue

Not everyone acts the same when they're sad. Sometimes you can tell that people are sad just by looking at them. They may be crying, walking around with their head down, or avoiding other people. Other times, though, sadness comes out differently, like being grouchy or angry. When this happens, kids may get into fights at school, yell at their brothers or sisters, or even throw things in frustration. It's as if their sadness turned into anger at the world.



Of course, you can have a mix of both. You can feel sad sometimes and grouchy other times.

Here are some typical signs of being sad or blue:

- You cry often during the day.
- You don't feel like playing games or joining in with other kids.

- You want to be alone a lot—at home, at school, or wherever.
- You don't seem to enjoy activities that you used to love (hobbies, games, sports, videos, and so on).

But feelings of sadness can also show up as feeling cranky or angry. For example:

- You might get mad or yell at people a lot, especially at home.
- You get into fights about little things you know don't really matter.
- You feel the urge to throw or break things—maybe you've even done this.
- Someone has told you that you're complaining or whining a lot.

Takeo's Story

Twelve-year-old Takeo has been upset ever since his dad moved to a different town. Now he only gets to see him every few weeks. He has started spending a lot of time in his room so he doesn't have to talk to anyone. Last night, when his mom knocked on his door and asked him to help with the dishes, he exploded and started yelling at her. The yelling got some of his angry feelings out, but he didn't feel good about being so mean to his mom.

Kids who are trying to be tough are more likely to show their sadness through anger. This is especially true for boys, because boys sometimes feel like they're being weak if they show their sad feelings. They may find it easier to get angry than to feel sad. In a way, feeling angry takes their minds off of being sad.

Some kids don't think they're sad or angry. They think they're fine and nothing's wrong. But sadness can show up as physical problems. This can include:

- headaches or stomachaches
- feeling tired, even when they've had enough sleep
- not being hungry or wanting to eat too much

These, too, can be signs of sadness. (Of course, they also can be signs of other physical problems, so it's a good idea to get a checkup with a healthcare professional if you're achy, tired, or in pain.)

Some Sadness Is Normal

We all feel "down in the dumps" sometimes. We have good and bad days. Maybe you've heard the saying that someone "got up on the wrong side of the bed." But for most kids, the feelings don't last. For example, if you feel sad and someone asks you to go outside and play, you might feel a little better. Once you get outdoors and move your body, you

start to feel stronger and more energized. Playing with friends can get your mind off your troubles, make you laugh, and remind you that people care about you. And before you know it, the sadness has gone away (at least a little).

For things that are especially important to you, such as the death of a pet or loved one, you may feel sad for a long time. You may be able to go about your day as normal, but you just don't feel like yourself. You don't have as much energy



as you used to and it's hard to get excited about new things. Usually, the more time that passes, the less sad you feel—and the less the sadness hurts.

Many people get the idea that sadness is “bad” or is something that should be avoided whenever possible. Sadness doesn't exactly feel *good*, but that doesn't mean it's bad. Plus, it can't be avoided—it's part of everyone's life.

If you feel sad a lot of the time, it may be a sign that you need some help. Feeling sad can tell you that you're learning how to handle a loss in your life. Sadness is part of the healing process. Feeling sad can also tell you that you need to work on fixing a problem. That problem might be making new friends, working harder in school to bring up your grades, or learning how to deal with bullies or an annoying sister or brother. The good news is, you

can fix the problems in your life. Reading this book is a good start!

As you begin thinking about your feelings of sadness and crankiness, it may help to keep a journal. A journal is simply a private place to keep track of your feelings and thoughts. It doesn't have to be anything fancy and you don't have to tell anyone that you're keeping a journal. Use it to write about what's going on in your life, or draw pictures if that's more your style. Taking the time to write down your thoughts often helps you discover more about how you feel—and helps you think of ways to work through your problems.



You may also find it helpful to talk to other people in your family about what it's like to feel cranky or blue. What makes them feel this way? How do they work through their feelings? Talk to your adult helper, your brother or sister, or anyone else you trust. You'll learn more about journals and talking to others about sadness in the next chapter, Blues Busters.

Note: If your sad feelings make it hard for you to do things you like or need to do—like going to school, playing with friends, doing your chores, eating—they may be turning into depression. Go to chapter 6 to learn more.