

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Are all of my feelings normal?

Understanding my strong emotions

**B**eing a teenager can be a lot of fun, but it can also be a difficult time. Your parents may be giving you more freedom and independence as you get older. You may have more responsibility than you did when you were younger. You may notice your emotions have grown stronger than when you were a child.

*Your anger feels more intense.*

*Your happiness feels greater.*

*Your sadness feels awful.*

Feelings can be very powerful. All of your feelings matter and are OK. It's helpful to pay attention to how you feel and to have a safe place to share your thoughts and emotions. We hope you consider expressing your feelings in this book or talking with a trusted adult or friend.

Some days you may worry about your mom or dad. The next day you may feel hopeful because your parent is having a good day and seems back to his/her "old self." Other days you may feel really mad at your parent. It's normal to experience all of these feelings. You may also feel several emotions all at once. For example, if your dad doesn't make it to your soccer game, you may feel both mad and hurt. You were really hoping that he would come to cheer you on, but you also understand how difficult it is for him to be in large crowds.

## Lesson Number 6

*It's normal to have a wide range of feelings  
about your family.*

Sorting through your mixed feelings can be tricky. In fact, you may find yourself having a hard time concentrating on schoolwork because you're worried about your family. Your grades may be dropping, you may be getting in trouble at school, or you may be having conflict with your friends. With all that you are juggling right now, it's understandable that you may struggle to manage these important parts of your own life.

Just being a young person these days is tough enough...much less adding the extra issues involved in having a parent who has experienced trauma. We hope that learning more about your parent's situation will help you feel more in control of your life.

Let's take a look at some common feelings young people experience. We will discuss how to handle these emotions in the next chapter.

## Anger

Living with someone with PTSD can be unpredictable. Your parent may not be able to be there when you'd like. Your mom or dad may do things that cause you to feel mad or frustrated. Although our society teaches us that it's not OK to be angry, we totally disagree. Anger is a basic human emotion that can give you important information. It's how you choose to act on that anger, not the feeling itself, that can be tricky. Poor choices can have negative consequences, which is why anger sometimes gets a bad reputation. In any case, it's normal to feel angry at your parent and your family situation. Accepting your parent and feeling compassion for his/her struggles may take time.

Think about a time when you felt really mad. Describe it.

What were you thinking?

What did you do?

Sometimes I feel really angry. I hate it when \_\_\_\_\_ (list three things that really upset you):

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Sometimes kids feel angry toward a variety of people. For example, some young people feel:

angry at my family because I just want to hang out with my friends and live my own life without having to worry about all these family problems.

angry at my parent because I don't know why he/she has to be like this. I feel deserted and abandoned at a time that I really need my mom or dad to be there for me.

angry at my friends because they have perfect lives and don't have to deal with all this garbage.

angry at God because I don't know why He did this to my parent.

Think about who you are angry at and why:

I'm angry at \_\_\_\_\_ for causing this to happen to my parent.

I'm angry at \_\_\_\_\_ for / because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ .

I'm angry at \_\_\_\_\_ for / because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ .

How could you tell these people how you feel?

**Hint:** When you choose to say tough things, it's helpful to focus on your own feelings and avoid blaming the other person. One way of doing this is called an "I message." The format looks like this:

"When you \_\_\_\_\_ (*describe the person's specific behavior that upset you*),

I feel or felt \_\_\_\_\_ (*identify your specific emotions*)."

For example, Paul (from Chapter 2) may express his anger to his dad for abusing alcohol and for quitting coaching Paul's soccer team by saying:

"Dad, when you quit coaching my soccer team and started drinking all the time, I felt angry and hurt."

Amy (from Chapter 5) might express her disappointment to her mom for failing to help explore different colleges by saying:

“Mom, when you wouldn't help me fill out the college applications and think through my choices , I felt lost and unloved .”

What do you want to say to your parent?

“Mom / Dad, when you \_\_\_\_\_  
I felt \_\_\_\_\_ .”

## Shame

At times you may feel ashamed of your parent. You may feel embarrassed by your mom or dad's behavior. You may avoid having friends over to your house because you don't know what kind of mood your parent will be in. You may feel badly when your friends' parents attend the homecoming football game or dance recital, but your parents don't show up even though they said they would. These feelings make a lot of sense when your parent's behavior is so unpredictable.

Think about a time when you felt ashamed or embarrassed about your parent's behavior. Please describe it. What did your parent do or say?

What was most difficult for you in that situation?

What were you thinking?