

STUFF THAT SUCKS



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First published in Great Britain in 2015 by Robinson.

Distributed in Canada by Raincoast Books

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Instant Help Books

An imprint of New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

5674 Shattuck Avenue

Oakland, CA 94609

www.newharbinger.com

Cover design by Amy Shoup

Original book design by Open Lab, Massey University (Catherine Adam, Kalos O'Connell, and Chloe Johnston)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sedley, Ben, author.

Title: Stuff that sucks : a teen's guide to accepting what you can't change and committing to what you can / Ben Sedley.

Description: Oakland, CA : Instant Help, 2017. | Series: The instant help solutions series | Audience: Age: 14-18.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016028112 (print) | LCCN 2016048175 (ebook) | ISBN 9781626258655 (paperback) | ISBN 9781626258662 (pdf e-book) | ISBN 9781626258679 (epub) | ISBN 9781626258662 (PDF e-book) | ISBN 9781626258679 (ePub)

Subjects: LCSH: Affect (Psychology)--Juvenile literature. | Emotions in adolescence--Juvenile literature. | Adolescent psychology--Juvenile literature.

Classification: LCC BF175.5.A35 S33 2017 (print) | LCC BF175.5.A35 (ebook) | DDC 155.5/19--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016028112>

Contents

[STUFF ABOUT THIS BOOK 6](#)

[STUFF THAT SUCKS 12](#)

[STUFF THAT MAKES THE STUFF THAT SUCKS SUCK MORE 22](#)

[STUFF THAT MATTERS 42](#)

[STUFF THAT IS HERE AND NOW 54](#)

[STUFF THAT IS JUST STUFF 66](#)

[OTHER STUFF THAT HELPS 80](#)



Don't believe a word I say

I'm not claiming to have all the answers for everyone.

I don't know you, so who am I to tell you what will make things better for you?

I do know a lot about psychology, and every day I talk to teenagers about the pain of their lives. But it's true, I don't know you.

What I can offer are ideas that work for other people, ideas that are being shown in research and more scientific studies to be effective. And I can try to explain them to you in ways that may make sense to young people I work with and may make sense to you as well.

Will these ideas work for you?

I hope so.

But there's only one way to find out, and that's to try them. Try them openly and honestly and if some ideas help then use those ones. If other ideas don't work for you, read on, and see what else there is. If no ideas help, then keep looking because there are other good ideas out there too. Near the end of this book I'll give some ideas about where to find further help.

I don't know you.

But I know a few things about you.

I know that sometimes life hurts like hell for you. Maybe a bit of the time, maybe not every minute of every day is agony. Sometimes the pain is sadness, sometimes worry, anger or shame or grief or some feeling that you don't even have words for.

Everyone has pain. And I still can't imagine how painful it is for you. Because it is pain, almost as if it is part of you.

And it hurts.

I know your pain makes sense. If I'd been through what you've been through (and all the other things you've been through before that) then I could feel the way you do too.

Sometimes other people have told you to get rid of your pain.

Your mom may have told you that "You'll be OK" (is she suggesting that you're not OK when you're sad?)...

Your grandfather may have told you that "You've got nothing to worry about. Back in my day..."

Your uncle may have said, "You're just doing it for attention..."

Your teacher may have said that "Now's not the time, just do your work..."

You may not even want your friends to know how much it hurts...

And other people just don't get it...

Of course you're trying to be happy.

And yet it still hurts.

Maybe it even hurts more after they've said those things.

In this book we will talk about the **stuff that sucks**, and the **stuff that makes the stuff that sucks suck more**. We'll notice how trying to fight your pain can make it so much painful, and how the System—friends, family, school, media, advertising, government almost everyone else around you—encourages you to waste so much time in a losing battle.

Then we will look at **stuff that matters** to you—your values—and some ways to find out what they are and how you can get closer to them. We will also discuss **stuff that matters here and now** to help you be more mindful and get some distance from the **stuff that is stuff**, all those thoughts and feelings which feel big and important but can get in the way of you working toward what really matters to you.

And as I said before, I truly appreciate you being open to these ideas, trying them out, and deciding if they make sense to you.

None of the concepts in this book were developed by me. The ideas come from acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), which was developed by Steven Hayes and other psychologists. ACT helps people work toward their own set of values, and let go of the unending and exhausting fight against painful thoughts and feelings. The approach makes sense to me, and the tools help me when I use them in my own life and when I work with young people. I found my own ways to explain the ideas and that's what I'm sharing here. If you're keen to know more about ACT after reading this, there are reading recommendations on the final page of this book.

Before we begin...



Notice what it feels like to be breathing in...

Notice what it feels like to be breathing out...

Notice all the thoughts that try to distract you...

Notice any painful feelings that come up and see if you can let them be there, rather than trying to ignore them or push them away...

Notice the thoughts that come up, telling you to try and ignore those feelings or push them away...

Notice the stuff that sucks...



**STUFF
THAT
SUCKS**

WORRY

Some days life can be terrifying. Everyone else seems to know what to do and what to say, yet it can feel like you don't even know how to be. Huge worrying thoughts come up.

Stuff like:

- They're judging me.
- They'll think I'm not confident.
- They'll laugh at me.

And while your brain is saying all that stuff, your body is busy having a freak out:

- Sore stomach
- Hard to breathe
- Heart racing
- Sweaty
- Red face
- Shaky
- Nauseous

And more...

It can feel like everyone is watching and the only reason they aren't commenting is polite.

Worry sucks.



SADNESS

Everyone has a different word for their sadness. Some call it a depression, a raincloud, or a fog. It can feel like being smothered by a heavy grey blanket. Everything looks bleak and feels too hard.

It's hard to sleep, but you also feel too tired to get out of bed. You can't concentrate on anything. It's too difficult to start new things and finishing anything is out of the question. You might feel like you can't cry even though you want to.

Your mind thinks about all the crap stuff that has happened and the awful stuff that has happened one day, and tells you that you're useless and that you're stupid for thinking like

Your body becomes heavy and slow. Thoughts even slower. Your mind may go to all sorts of scary places—running away, hurting yourself, even suicide.

Sometimes the grey blanket can start to lift after a few days, although at the time it can feel like much longer. Or it might be smothering for weeks or months and the more you try to push it off, the heavier it feels.

Sadness has an important role in our lives. But it can be so hard to think of that you're alone, stuck under a heavy grey blanket.



LONELINESS

We live in a world that tells us to be an individual and to be independent, yet sometimes it doesn't always feel safe. Sometimes being different feels like a painful and lonely path.

It doesn't matter how many friends you have or how close they are. There are days

you're supposed to be. But deep down you feel totally different. Disconnected even.

And the more you want that connection, the more distant or wrong you feel.

You try to say all the right words and do all the right things and play the right game and still you feel alone and different. Like no one will ever truly understand how weird and isolated you feel. And you're not sure you'd want people to know anyway. You wonder if others would even stick around if they could see the true you.

You try to be funny enough or smart enough or cool enough so that you can fit in.

Yet it can still feel like you're just filling in time until they find out the truth. Discover that you're a fraud and an imposter. Or discover that you're fundamentally broken and not worth loving.



ANGER

It can be hard to think straight when you're feeling angry. Or to act rationally. You want to act rationally.

threaten violence, or even to be violent.

At least in the short term.

Maybe your anger is masking sadness or worry. That's another thing that sucks. Anger can lead to shame.



SHAME

Of all the emotions in the world, shame can be the hardest to talk about. Often it's the hardest to think about. The memory of THAT THING you didn't mean to do or say, but somehow happened anyway. That person you never meant to be, but became. The memory gnaws away at you. It probably doesn't even feel like a memory; instead it's happening over and over again—each time you try to do something different but end up doing or saying the same thing again.

You can see it and feel it—in your winded stomach, in your red face, in your tight f

Others may even tell you that it wasn't that big a deal, but they don't get it. It w