



# COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

## I Have Questions - Coping

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

### BOTTOM LINE

**You have to feel to move forward.**

### GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

Help your students think critically about how they are coping, and whether or not it is helping or hurting them.

### SCRIPTURE

*The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning (Lamentations 3:19-23 NLT).*

### TEACHING OUTLINE

#### INTRODUCTION

- *Communicator Note: Share a personal story about what you used to cope with your emotions when you were a teenager, and how it impacted your life.*

#### TENSION

- The reality is we are all feeling this a lot these days.
- *Note: The Interactive happens here. See your Teaching Script for details.*
- Maybe some of you—like me in high school—bury your emotions. When something happens that you don't like, you try to escape to something else.
- In a word, we're coping. And, for a lot of us, that means trying to numb or escape the things we don't want to feel.
- We look for ways to escape because we want relief.
- The problem is, sometimes what we do for relief ends up creating more stress. Why? Because ignoring doesn't make something disappear.
- So, stick with me because I think this can actually help us move forward, and actually cope instead of getting stuck.

#### TRUTH

- We're going to look at a passage out of the book of Lamentations in the Old Testament. The name of the book comes from the word *lament*, which means expressing grief or mourning.
- The writer of Lamentations, who a lot of people believe was the prophet Jeremiah, talks about his own situation this way (*Lamentations 3:19-23 NLT*).
- He's *hurting*. It's so bad that he says he will never forget what he is feeling. This is important to pay attention to: Jeremiah doesn't downplay what's going on.
- He moves from naming how he feels to naming what is true about God. **He makes sure that he tells himself truth in the middle of his difficult circumstances and feelings**—the kind of truth that gives him hope to push forward.
- In order to fully feel hope, we need to fully feel our other emotions, however painful they might be.
- So how did Jeremiah find the strength and courage to feel his difficult emotions? Because of what he says at the end of this verse (*Lamentations 3:23 NLT*).
- Jeremiah recognizes there is a new start. Every morning, we get a fresh dose of hope, love, and promise from God. That's how we cope—with fresh hope from God.

### APPLICATION

- If we want to get through our feelings and not just around them, we have to feel them, knowing there is hope on the other side.
- We need to heal.
- *Note: The Interactive happens here. See your Teaching Script for details.*
- If we want to heal, we need to do what Jeremiah did:
  - Lament.
  - Name the hope.
- You have to heal to move forward.
- Take a few minutes and think about how you avoid feeling. What are you using to turn off or turn down your feelings?
- If you are using something to numb your feelings and you aren't sure you can stop, invite other people into your life. Find a trusted friend, adult, or Small Group Leader to help process what's going on.

### LANDING

- No one should deal with the hurt from life alone. We all need each other. In fact, that's one of the biggest reasons why we have Small Groups.
- Small Groups are created so that we can experience life together—ALL of life, not just the good parts. So, if you aren't sure who to talk to, we encourage you to start with your Small Group Leader.
- Eventually, we have to feel to move forward toward the big, abundant, joy-filled, better-than-you-think-is-possible-right-now life that God wants for us.

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## INTERACTIVE

There are two Interactives for this script.

The first Interactive happens in the Tension section; please see that section for more details. For this Interactive you'll need...

- A cell phone.

The second Interactive happens in the Application section; please see that section for more details.  
For this Interactive you'll need...

- Band-Aids.
- Medical patches.



# TEACHING SCRIPT

## I Have Questions - Coping

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

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HOME

### BOTTOM LINE

**You have to feel to move forward.**

## INTRODUCTION

3.5 MINUTES

*(Communicator Note: Share a personal story about what you used to cope with your emotions when you were a teenager, and how it impacted your life.)*

Alright, I'm ready to be judged. I'm ready.

Escape rooms are a special challenge to me—but I love them. It's an "experience".

You basically pay to be put in a situation with a few different people, some you may know and some you may not, get stuck, and where the most rewarding part is leaving.

I get that the idea of being locked in a room where the only way out is working with people, that you might have only just met, to figure out math problems, word problems, under extremely stressful situations is a sort of heartless torture, but I'm kinda weird and I think it's fun. If you've never been, they all have a fake theme. One might be preventing a bomb from detonating. Another might be zombies trying to overrun your hideout. Or it might be that a terrible disease is about to attack the planet—okay, that one sounds less fun these days. But the idea is simple. You have to get out. You have to escape. And when you do, it feels amazing. I love being the first to escape. I always have, but when I was younger the escaping looked a little different.

I grew up in a house with a LOT of conflict. My parents' marriage was failing. My mom's drinking was out of control. I don't know if you've been there, but when stuff is going wrong at your house, it can really mess with you. You feel a lot of things you wish you didn't, and my go-to move was to try and escape.

Now I didn't *literally* run away, although the thought crossed my mind. As a kid, I would escape from the fighting by staying in my room for hours. When I got my driver's license, I'd escape to my friends.

One night, my parents got in a huge fight. The cops were called. Once the police got there and I told them my side of the story, I asked them if I could leave. I had a friend who lived down the road. I asked if I could spend the night because I was "bored". I didn't tell the truth because I hid everything that happened at home. When I got to my friend's house, I knew that I'd eventually face the same problem I always did...

At some point, I'd have to go back.

I couldn't stay away forever. See, I wanted to forget the pain that I felt because my family was a wreck. And for a while, it seemed like escaping was the best option. On the outside, I seemed fine. But on the inside, I was insecure, anxious, bitter, and angry. I thought I could only feel better if I escaped my life, so I continued to find new ways to run away. I escaped by drinking for a while. I escaped with friends. I even went through a period where I got super serious about school, and used being "super busy" as an excuse to escape what was going on at home. All the while, I simply counted down the days until I could legit escape by leaving home forever.

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## TENSION

3 MINUTES

Maybe you can relate to my story—either to having family drama or school stress or general "I'm a human living in times of pandemics and injustice and global warming" kind of stress. The reality is, we are all feeling this a lot these days.



*For this Interactive, you will need a cell phone to illustrate the different ways people cope.*

*Say something like this: "I heard the analogy that emotions are like getting calls on our cell phone. Sometimes they're expected, and other times they're unexpected (use the phone to demonstrate each of the following responses):"*

- *We have the ability to answer them and connect with them.*
- *Put them on FaceTime and focus on nothing BUT them.*
- *If you're braver than me, you straight decline them, send them to voicemail, and pretend like they don't exist.*
- *Mute them, or turn off your phone and hide it."*

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In high school, I did that last one a lot. Emotions would call and I'd be like "bye", toss the phone in my bag and ignore it.

Maybe some of you—like me in high school—bury your emotions. **When something happens that you don't like, you try to escape to something else.** Think about it. When your parents are fighting or you're having friend drama, how do you typically deal with it? Do you hide your feelings because you think that showing emotion makes you feel weak? When you feel the pressure to get good grades, get into a good college, or handle your own insecurities, how do you process all of it? Maybe you...

- Escape by binge-watching Netflix shows where you can be part of a different story and a life that isn't your own.
- Scroll through TikTok for hours until your mind is numb.
- Start up a game, ditch squads, then go for a "hot drop"—just to get an adrenaline rush.
- Numb by overeating so that you don't feel your emotions, or not eating at all to feel some kind of control.
- Take part in self-harm behaviors, hurting others, or fits of rage.
- Quiet the noise of emotions with porn, relationships, drinking, drugs, just so we don't have to feel what's going on underneath the surface, bottled up, ready to explode.

In a word, we're coping. And, for a lot of us, that means trying to numb or escape the things we don't want to feel.

We look for ways to escape because we want relief. The problem is, sometimes what we do for relief ends up creating more stress. Why? **Because ignoring doesn't make something disappear.** You know that already. You have experienced it. That's why, today, I want to share with you something that might actually be helpful. It's been helpful to me. And, fair warning, it sounds like the *worst* possible idea. But stick with me, because I think this can actually help us move forward, and actually cope instead of getting stuck.

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## TRUTH

5 MINUTES

The Bible is divided into two major parts: the Old Testament, which was before Jesus came to Earth, and the New Testament, which represents the time after Jesus came to Earth. We're going to look at a passage out of the book of Lamentations in the Old Testament. The name of the book comes from the word *lament*, which means expressing grief or mourning. It's not a word that we often use, but it's something you might feel. You might feel it if your team lost the game on the final play. You'd definitely feel it if the family pet passed away. It's basically feeling sad. A whole book about being sad. (See, I told you it would sound like a terrible idea! Stick with me!) The writer of Lamentations, who a lot of people believe was the prophet Jeremiah, talks about his own situation this way...

***The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning (Lamentations 3:19-23 NLT).***

Clearly, Jeremiah is going through it! He says that he is "bitter beyond words". We all get that. Go ahead, just think about something that has made you "bitter beyond words". You've been there, right?

He's *hurting*. It's so bad that he says he will never forget what he is feeling. This is important to pay attention to: Jeremiah doesn't downplay what's going on. He doesn't avoid it, drink it away, pretend it away, or sugarcoat what he's dealing with. He writes out his reality, as painful and real as it is.

Jeremiah not only talks about the circumstances that caused his pain, but also about how he felt about them. He names exactly what is going on, and he doesn't stop there. He moves from naming how he feels to naming what is true about God. **He makes sure that he tells himself truth in the middle of his difficult circumstances and feelings**—the kind of truth that gives him hope to push forward.

I think that sometimes we will do anything to NOT feel all of our feelings because it hurts. So we avoid them altogether, but Jeremiah demonstrates a willingness to feel them, however bad they are. The trick is to not stay there. This is important for us, too. **In order to fully feel hope, we need to fully feel our other emotions, however painful they might be.**

So how did Jeremiah find the strength and courage to feel his difficult emotions? Because of what he says at the end of this verse...

***The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. (Lamentations 3:23 NIV)***

Did you catch that? Jeremiah recognizes there is a new start. Every morning, we get a fresh dose of hope, love, and promise from God. That's how we cope—with fresh hope from God.

God's love, faithfulness, and compassion allow us to cope with every negative experience or feeling we have. We can't escape the pain without escaping the good stuff on the other side. His faithfulness doesn't change: it's new every morning. So when our pain is new, so is God's love. When our hurt is fresh, so is God's faithfulness. Because of God, we can handle whatever is causing us pain.

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## APPLICATION

6.5 MINUTES

That doesn't mean you should never watch Netflix if you're sad, or have an ice cream as you calm down. It just means that those don't fix anything. **If we want to get through them and not just around them, we have to feel them, knowing there is hope on the other side.** Netflix can't heal our pain. Drinking won't make the difficulty go away. Staying up all night won't fix the problem. They will help us escape temporarily, but they won't help us heal. And we need to heal.

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## INTERACTIVE

For this Interactive, you'll use items that "patch", but don't fix. Say something like this...

*"When we go to quick-fixes, they're like band-aids. They don't heal hurts; they simply cover them up temporarily. They're coping strategies that never get to the heart of our hurts and the emotions that we feel."*

*"For example, when I drank alcohol as a way to cope, I didn't allow myself to acknowledge and experience my difficult circumstances and feelings. As a result, I did not find hope. And because of that, I needed to drink more and more to avoid the emotions that always seemed to come back."*

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If we want to heal, we need to do what Jeremiah did...

- 1. Lament.** Lamenting is just naming our difficulties, saying how we feel about it, refusing to act like it's no big deal. When you lament, be specific. Say them out loud or write them down. And, maybe most importantly, say them to God. Your Heavenly Father wants to hear, especially when you're hurting. He's not mad if you say, "Hey, this is awful," or, "I'm bitter beyond words." You can be honest with Him.
- 2. Name the hope.** Understand that in the midst of our circumstances and feelings, there's still hope. A bad day, a bad moment, a bad couple of weeks, does *not* equal a bad life. God always meets us on the other side. Just like we're specific about our pain, we need to name specifically what's true and where our hope is, and name it over and over and over.

This is how we can begin to heal our hurts instead of trying to escape them. As we do this hard work, here's what we realize...

**You have to feel to move forward.**

I want you to take a few minutes and think about how you avoid feeling. **What are you using to turn off or turn down your feelings?** Is it social media, video games, sleeping, eating or not eating? It isn't that these things in and of themselves are bad. It's that they are being used to do something they weren't meant to do—keep us from dealing with reality. When these things are used the wrong way, they'll never accomplish what we want them to.

Or maybe you find yourself engaging in self-harm, drinking, smoking, pornography or some other “thing” that only you know about. In these cases, you aren't just numbing the pain, you're hurting yourself. You need to know that the additional pain you're creating doesn't erase the other pain. It doesn't make it go away.

And hey, I get it. Sometimes big pain causes us to get stuck into coping behaviors we never meant to use long-term. If you are using something to numb your feelings and you aren't sure you can stop, invite other people into your life. Find a trusted friend, adult, or Small Group Leader to help process what's going on. They can help you acknowledge what you're going through, but also, they can help remind you of hope when you need it. And there will come a time when we all need the reminder.

For those of you sitting here wondering, “Why would I tell someone else my pain when I haven't even admitted it to myself?” I get it. For you, I want you to ask yourself, “What is getting in the way of me healing for real?” Many of us are embarrassed, ashamed, afraid of judgment. Some of us have believed this lie that having big pain or big emotions is weakness. Opening up and sharing with others who are trustworthy will not only challenge the lies that hold you back, but can help lead you to peace and healing. If you aren't quite ready to say it out loud, I would encourage you to write it down. Then, when you're ready, share them with someone else. You may even want to meet with your Small Group Leader to help you figure it out.

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## LANDING

1 MINUTE

No one should deal with the hurt from life alone. We all need each other. In fact, that's one of the biggest reasons why we have Small Groups. Small Groups are created so that we can experience life together—ALL of life, not just the good parts. So if you aren't sure who to talk to, we encourage you to start with your Small Group Leader. You don't even have to look them in the eye. Just text them one or two words letting them know you're up for a conversation. They won't make it weird, and you'll be glad you did.

I believe that we can't escape what we feel. We can numb it for a little while, but eventually we have to feel to move forward toward the big, abundant, joy-filled, better-than-you-think-is-possible-right-now life that God wants for us.



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS