Unit 2
Nozipho’s story

When bad things happen

Life Orientation Learning Outcomes covered in this unit
(Only relevant outcomes are listed)

Learning Outcome 3: Personal Development
The learner will be able to use acquired life skills to achieve and extend personal potential to respond effectively to challenges in his or her world

- Find out how you can be affected by frightening or sad things that happen to you.
- Learn how you can help yourself to feel better over time.
- Be committed to finding people who you trust who can listen to you.

Look in the Educator’s Guide for information about Assessment Standards and how they link to the activities.
Nozipho’s story

I was so happy to be chosen for the youth choir, but then everything went wrong.

I went to ntate Molefe’s spaza on the way home from the audition...

I know you don’t want to get hurt. Where’s the cash?

It affected me at school ...

Come on Nozi, you’re in the choir now, sing us a song.

I said I don’t want to. Leave me alone.

At home ...

Nozi, what’s wrong? You hardly eat.

At night ...

You need to go and talk to Mrs Jardine. She is Kird. I’ll come with you.

Inside I feel like I might burst. I’m so scared ... What am I going to do?

What is it Nozi? You can tell me.

There was this man ... He robbed ntate Molefe... I saw him and he threatened me.

A week later ...

Well Nozi, you’ll just have to keep singing whenever you feel bad.

... I’m glad I talked to someone.

Ya! Sing us a song now!

I feel a bit better now I have talked. I know it will take a long time before I forget it but ...

Talk about the comic together

- What was the bad thing that happened to Nozi?
- How did this horrible thing affect her?
- What helped her to feel a bit better?
- Have you ever had a really bad thing happen to you?
- Who could you go to for help?
When Nozipho saw the robbery at Molefe's shop, and when the robber threatened her, she experienced a very big shock. We sometimes call this a traumatic experience. A traumatic experience is a very, very frightening thing that happens to us.

Many children in South Africa have traumatic experiences. Some children are involved in car crashes, or robberies, or shootings. Some children are abused or have had to look after their very ill parents. Some children's parents have even died. These are all traumatic experiences.

If anything like this has happened to you, you probably felt some of the things that Nozipho felt.

Fact File

These are some of the things that children who have had a very bad thing happen to them can experience:

- Not sleeping at night, and having bad dreams.
- A picture of the bad happening flashes into your mind when you don’t expect it – we call this a flashback.
- Big emotions that take over your whole heart and head – sadness, anger, fear. The feelings are sometimes so big you cannot think of anything else. It is like you are drowning in them.
- Aches in the body like stomach-aches or headaches.
- Not wanting to go anywhere near the place where the bad thing happened.
- Being very jumpy or shaky, and sweating a lot – even for a little fright. Changing feelings – one minute you are fine and then suddenly you get very angry or very sad.
- Losing interest in school and friends. Losing interest in activities that you enjoyed before. Some children even feel so bad that they stop wanting to care for themselves, and they stop washing or brushing their hair, or eating.
- Feeling guilty or feeling embarrassed.
- Feeling very angry and wanting revenge.
- A feeling of giving up, as if there is no hope.

It is important to get help if you feel any of these things. Find someone to talk to. See the Fact File on page xx for information on where to find help.
It is important to try and think about what you are feeling. If we name our feelings, it makes them less frightening.

**Activity 1**

**Naming feelings**

1. There are many, many kinds of feelings. The page opposite shows some of them. The small animal drawing will help you to decide what feeling the drawing is showing.

2. Work in groups. One person must take a pencil, close their eyes and place the pencil on the circle drawing, then open their eyes and see which feeling the pencil has landed on.

3. They must show with their body and voice what the feeling sounds and looks like. Tell about a time when you felt that feeling.

4. Each person should then have a go. Help each other to show the feeling.

A girl saw her cousin knocked over and killed by a car. Here is a drawing of some of the feelings she has when she thinks about her cousin. Do you ever feel like her? What feelings do you have?
Sometimes you may feel very scared, or angry, or helpless when you are at a particular place. It can be the place where the bad thing happened to you or a place that is similar. Sometimes certain situations make us feel very bad, for example when we are alone, or when we are alone with a particular person. It is useful to think about **when** and **where** we feel certain feelings because then we can begin to find ways of controlling them.
When Nozi did not talk about what had happened, things just got worse for her.

When Nozi told about what had happened, she felt a little bit better. Children who have had a traumatic experience often don’t tell and this makes them feel bad and sad. If something has happened to you, it is important that you find someone to tell.

Fact File

If you are feeling overwhelmed by bad and sad feelings, you need to find someone to talk to:

Childline: If you have no one you trust, you can phone Childline on 080 005 5555. They will refer you to someone in your area to help you. This is a free call from a landline.

Psychologist: Some children go to see a psychologist. The psychologist is trained to help people who have been through a traumatic experience. They will listen and help you to tell your story.

Pastor: You could go and talk to the priest or pastor at your church.

Teacher: Teachers can be good listeners too. Talk to a teacher you trust.

A family member: Your mother or father, an aunt or uncle, or even a big brother or sister can be a good person to talk to.

Activity 2 Who can I tell?

1. Sit quietly alone for a while and think about the people who you could talk to.
2. Make a list of them and then put them in order of the best person down to the least useful person.
3. Find a time when they are alone and tell them about what happened to you. Don’t forget to tell them how you are feeling.
4. Maybe you are worried that you will not be able to find the words to tell them. You can write something down or even draw a picture that shows your feelings. Give this to them to make it easier to tell.
Talking to friends can help too. Use this activity to get talking.

Activity 3 Talking together

Sit in a circle in a small group with this page in front of you. One person closes their eyes and points to one of the boxes on the page. Then they must open their eyes, see which box they have pointed to and say a few sentences about what is written in that box.

- Think of someone you can go to if you’re feeling scared or sad. What does that person do or say that makes you feel better?

- Your best friend’s mom died a little while ago. When you shared your sandwich with him at lunchtime today, he said, “That’s a good sandwich... my mum used to make me sandwiches like that.” How do you think your friend was feeling?

- When you lie in bed at night, do you sometimes have scary thoughts? How do you feel? What could make you feel better?

- Some people who are sad or afraid like someone just to be close to them, without talking. Would you like that if you were sad? What else would you like them to do?

- If you went to a friend to talk about a problem you are having, name three things you would not want your friend to say or do.

- Themba saw a man shot on his way to the shops one evening. What do you think he is feeling? Why?

- Think of someone you can tell your problems to. What makes you trust that person?

- What else would you like them to do?

- Sometimes bad things can make us stronger. Do you agree or disagree? Say why.

- Francis and his mother were in the car when it was hijacked. Now, when he thinks about it, he gets very, very angry. What could he do to change his feelings?

- Your best friend’s father is very sick in hospital after an accident – he may even die. What could you do or say to your best friend?

- Which do you think is true: “Only babies cry!” or “It’s all right to feel sad and cry. We all do sometimes”??
I am ?.

My story is very sad but it has a little bit of hope in it. The hope comes from the group that I go to every week that helps me.

In 2004 I was walking with my father in the street. We were hit by a car. My father died and I had a head injury. Sometimes still I have fits because of it. Then my mother died too. When my mother and father died my aunties and uncles just took my parent’s money and did not care for me. I stay all the time in a boarding school. I have got no one who cares for me.

But I do have Sis Neo and Sis Portia who are at the centre at the hospital. I go there every week. I also have another person who is working here at the hostel she listens to me when I am very sad and cry. She took me to the centre when I got so very sad.

At the centre I am part of a group. We are called the All Stars group. We have all had bad things happen to us. We meet every Tuesday after school. We play games and make things we also talk about how we are feeling. I love to go there. Sometimes people at school say I am mad and call me bad things. But I don’t care who is saying gossiping about me because I get help from the All Stars. In the group we learn how to support each other and talk about how our feelings are.

We made a book about our lives in the group and talked about the painful things. We also made pictures in our book of the people who helped us – I drew pictures of Sis Neo and Sis Portia and my friend in the hostel.

We do talk about the pain that we have and that makes it easier. I learned from the group that if bad things have happened to you, you should not live with them and not share.
Simon’s Story

Bafana had lost his socks, Precious was packing her bag (as neatly as she could), Jack was teasing Nompi, who was shrieking. Little Lucky was just running in circles making the noise of a motorbike.

Mama Sara came in to hurry them up. “Come Bafana, where is your sock? Come now Precious, that looks tidy enough, go and eat, my child. Jack, stop now, and Nompi, go brush your hair. Come Lucky, let’s go and find Mr Mbambo. I am sure he is ready now with the truck for school.”

No one noticed Simon. He sat very still, his knees digging into his chest and his heart heavy.

Suddenly they were all gone ... the only sound the radio playing softly from Mama Sara’s room down the passage.

Simon breathed in, trying to lighten the stone in his chest. Since last month that feeling like a stone in his chest had been there.

Sis Gloria came to him at Ma Thumi’s house and called him to sit close to her. She held his hand and he knew from her eyes what she would say. Since that day when she told him his mother had died, the stone had sat in his chest.

When he ate supper with the other children, when he played soccer at break, when he washed himself at night, the feeling was there. But mostly in the morning when he woke to the noise of the other children, the stone feeling was there in his chest.
When his mother died Sis Gloria had brought him here to the home with the other children. He liked it here, Mama Sara was kind and they went to school in a truck and the other children were funny.

But every morning he remembered his mother singing.

Simon sat squashed between the cupboard and his bed, and the stone feeling got heavier and heavier as he thought about his mother’s song.

The stone was so heavy and his knees were so numb he did not notice Mama Sara until she was right close to him. She stood there, very still.

After a long time she said, “It’s that feeling like a stone, isn’t it, in here?” and she touched her chest. “You think of her in the morning, right?” He nodded and wondered how she knew. “We all feel that heavy heart when we remember them, the ones we loved. Sometimes it is so heavy you feel you cannot move, you cannot find your clothes for school, or brush your teeth or eat breakfast.”

Mornings had been special at home. He would wake to the sound of the radio. His mother loved gospel and she would sing. He lay in their bed watching her shadow through the curtain. He could see the pot of water boiling on the primus stove and the cups she had placed ready. He could see her dressing while the water boiled and she sang, “Tsohle di antse ke wena, everything is done by you, God ...”
Simon nodded again and wondered how she knew. She sat for some time more and suddenly Simon felt the tears. He did not want to cry, especially with Mama Sara there. But he could not stop them.

Mama Sara sat very still as he cried. After a long time, she said, “It helps a bit to cry. It lets the feeling out,” and she held his hand.

“Here.” She passed him some tissue and he blew his nose. “It takes time, Simon. It takes a long time before we feel better after someone we love has died. Come.”

Simon stood up and as he did he felt something under his foot. “Bafana’s sock!” Mama Sara chuckled and suddenly he remembered how funny Bafana had looked with his one sock and he began to smile too.

“It takes time Simon. It takes time, but we can do it. You’ll see.”

Activity 

Talk together about the story

1. How was Simon feeling? Have you ever felt like this about something that happened to you?
2. What did Simon learn from Mama Sara? How can crying help us when we are very sad?
3. What did you learn from the story? Could you write your own story – like this one? Perhaps one day your story will help another child, like Simon’s story has helped you.

Simon’s story is written by Glynis Clacherty. It is one of 24 books published by Heinemann in the Junior African Writers Series (JAWS) on the subject of HIV/AIDS. Each beautifully illustrated book tells a sensitive story which helps children deal with different aspects of HIV/AIDS. You can order the books from Heinemann Publishers tel: (011) 322 8600 or customerliaison@heinemann.co.za
1. Everybody has some days when they feel good and other days when they feel bad – this is normal.
2. Close your eyes and remember during the last few months one day that was a really good day.
3. Draw the good day on a piece of paper.
4. Talk with a partner:
   - What made it a good day?
   - What were you doing?
   - Who were you with?
5. Could you do some of these things or be with these people more often?
6. Stick your picture somewhere where you can see it to remind yourself of the days you feel good.

Try this when your feelings get too big for you to handle

This is a calming breath exercise:
1. Breathe in slowly through your nose for five counts. Count slowly: “One ... two ... three ... four ... five.”
2. Hold your breath for five counts.
3. Breathe out slowly, through your nose or mouth, for six counts. Breathe out all the air.
4. Take two normal breaths. Repeat steps 1 to 3.
5. Keep doing this exercise for three to five minutes. If you start to feel light-headed, stop for 30 seconds and then start again.

(Adapted from Sharon Lewis, Childhood Trauma: Understanding Traumatised Children in South Africa. 1999. David Philip, p 57)
Activity 6  When I feel better

1. Take three pieces of paper.
2. On the first paper, draw activities or people that make you feel better when you are sad.
3. On the second paper, draw activities and people that make you feel better when you are angry.
4. And finally draw on the third paper activities and people that help you to feel better when you feel guilty or bad.

Find someone to share your pictures with.

Here is a picture drawn by a boy whose mum and dad died. He has drawn all the things that make him feel better. Read what he wrote about these things around the picture.

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What makes me to feel comfortable is support from friends, family, neighbours and church, including my support group members and staff.

My mother used to be the hard worker at school and she was serious about education. So when I study or do my schoolwork, I’m trying to make her happy and proud of me because I’m doing the things she used to do.

When I play soccer I feel happy. My father used to appreciate that I play soccer because it makes me healthy, keeps me busy and it’s part of exercise.

At church or anywhere when I pray, I’m including them in my prayer to show that I still love them too much and miss them. And that God will be with them and me.
Find something that makes you happy and keeps you busy, something that you can do with other children is best. This will help you to feel better when you feel very sad or afraid.

- You could play soccer like Sipho.
- Zingi does art ... ... and dances in the park!
- KG listens to music when he feels sad.
- Singing in the choir helped Nozipho.
- What do you like to do?