

HOW TO SURVIVE EVERYTHING

READING GROUP GUIDE



1. When Haley and her little brother are abducted by their father, Ed, he tells them a series of lies “to protect them from the truth”. We could call these “noble lies” or “useful lies.” How important is the theme of truth versus lies in the novel? Do we ever have to tell others lies “to protect them from the truth?”
2. Do you think the role of fiction has changed in the “era of post truth?” Do we want fiction these days to help us navigate towards “the truth” or to distract us from it?
3. Have you come across a “reluctant hero” like Haley before—a protagonist who really doesn’t want to be in the story?
4. In what ways are the challenges Haley faces different from the generations before? Do Generation Z have unique problems and qualities caused by parenting, technology and their experience of lockdowns?
5. Did reading *How to Survive Everything* make you feel different about family life, skepticism about official government “truth,” fake news and real news, preparedness for disasters, or anything else in your life? Did the book make you want to start “prepping?”
6. According to recent divorce statistics, 44.6% marriages in the USA end in divorce. What does the novel say about the modern, technology-dependent, divorced family? Are Haley and Ben placed in new kinds of power struggles because of Ed and Justine’s divorce?
7. The book has dark humor. Which were the parts of the story that made you laugh out loud, and were they the darkest parts or the parts with the misunderstandings between people?
8. As a child of a fraught divorce, Haley has a difficult relationship with both of her parents, and her little brother has also developed some maladaptive behaviors in trying to please both parents with their conflicting belief systems. Does Haley love her parents?
9. Justine has made it her task in life to protect her kids, Haley and Ben. Is it possible that in focusing on the details she lost the bigger picture? Or was she right to try to protect them from their father?
10. There are books within the book itself. Haley discovers that the preppers have not prepped very well for the apocalypse because they’ve only salvaged 5 books. Which five books would you salvage, if it was your job to rebuild civilization after a cataclysmic collapse?
11. Some readers are very fond of the secondary characters in the story—Danny, Meg, Ray, even Kade. As preppers, they have developed some eccentric and sometimes intense behaviors and routines. Who was your favorite and why?
12. According to *The Washington Post*, as many as 50% of Americans believe in one conspiracy theory or another? Ed, the ex-journalist, has developed a paranoid, conspiracy theory mindset. Do you think he was right all along? Should we ban all conspiracy theories or investigate them?
13. Would the romance between Haley and Danny survive in the real world, if there was no pandemic? If not, then is there a chance that Haley secretly wants the pandemic to be real so that she can be with Danny?
14. Did these characters get anything positive out of their sense that the world was ending and that they were survivors? Or is their isolation from, and fear of the world, entirely negative?
15. What do you think Haley’s message is at the end? What has she learned in this traumatic coming-of-age story? Is there anything that we can learn from her?
16. What are the “five last things” that you’d save from our culture if you had to rebuild civilization from scratch? A guitar?
An encyclopedia?
A hammer? ■

