

WONDERS & WORRIES

Using Books to Facilitate Conversations



Wonders & Worries

Professional support for children through a parent's illness or injury.

We will, together.



Stories can be therapeutic as they help children process information, open up dialogue, and/or elicit further self-reflection and understanding. Using books in this way is called bibliotherapy. Through story, children can enter into challenging topics from a distance. Children are able to learn how characters may respond to similar situations and naturally think about applying those ideas to their own experiences.

For example, in the book, *The Kissing Hand* (by Audrey Penn), children are introduced to feelings a young raccoon experiences when he is faced with leaving his mom to go to school. The book then introduces a method to support an ongoing sense of connection with the parent raccoon while they are separated (which a child may be able to apply through their

experiences when a parent is hospitalized, at appointments, etc.). Bibliotherapy and use of metaphor is a powerful way to gently engage children, especially when they are navigating a difficult situation.

GOALS OF BIBLIOTHERAPY:

- Identify and validate feelings: “So many feelings at once can be hard to manage.”
- Normalize feelings: “Other children who have a parent with cancer have felt the same way.”
- Stimulate discussion: “I wonder if you have ever felt that way?”
- Foster thoughts and self-awareness: “Naming how you feel is the first step to dealing with a feeling. When was the last time you felt sad?”
- Discover possible coping skills and solutions: “In the book, the main character felt better after talking to his friend about what he was worried about. What do you think might help you when you feel worried?”

BIBLIOTHERAPY IN ACTION:

- Identify the needs of a particular child or group of children. This will help as you determine the book that will help meet the above-mentioned goals.
- Once you have found a book that is appropriate for age, maturity, and background, ensure you have read it thoroughly. The story and characters should be realistic with helpful problem-solving ideas. If a particular topic is not available via text, finding the material in other formats may work as well (e.g., video, audiobooks, etc.).
- Determine the best way to have children hear the content. Depending on what topic is being discussed, developmental level, etc., it may be best to read the book aloud. In other situations, it may work well to have children read independently or in small groups.
- Afterwards, provide opportunities to explore the content further with discussion and activities. Suggestions may be to ask open-ended questions, have children share their interpretations of aspects of the story, use puppets to act out certain parts, or any other activity to dive further into the story.

Through reading the book and interacting with the content in different ways, children may better understand:

- Other children who are in a similar situation have similar feelings.
- All children (and people) experience hardships throughout life.
- Everyone has strengths and areas they are working on.
- Facing a problem is the first step to being able to manage it.
- There may be many challenges but there are equally as many tools to solve problems.
- Ideas to empower and help promote resiliency.

Bibliotherapy is a powerful tool, although for especially difficult situations, it is best if used with additional support (e.g., counseling, or a resource that works well for your unique situation).

**The information above has been adapted from an [article](#) by Leah Davies (M.Ed.).*

We are continually here to support you as you navigate the best plan for including your children throughout this medical situation. **To connect with a child life specialist, please contact the Wonders & Worries Helpline at 1-844-WE-WONDER or helpline@wondersandworries.org.**



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