

Picture books can help children learn how to be resilient

Susan Ramsay, Early Literacy Specialist (Hastings –Frontenac -Lennox & Addington)

Madison's mom is on tour of duty. She left shortly before Madison started school for the first time. Sometimes Madison misses her mom so much that it hurts inside. Sometimes she tries to picture her mom's face and can't. Then she feels scared. Madison doesn't really understand how long her mom will be away. She knows her mom won't be home for Christmas and hopes Santa will know how to find her even if Madison has no idea where Afghanistan is.

It's a tough time for Madison, but she and her dad are doing all right. Her dad's calmness reassures Madison that her mom will be home as soon as she can. By example, her dad shows Madison that when things feel stressful, they can problem-solve and stay realistically optimistic. He shares picture books with Madison about story characters that struggle with feelings of loneliness or fear. Stories give both of them a safe way of talking about how they can cope in challenging times.

Intuitively Madison's dad is teaching his daughter to become resilient. Resilient children demonstrate a growing ability to control their impulses and emotions. They understand how their actions can affect others, and begin to develop empathy.

Jennifer Pearson, lead trainer for "Reaching In Reaching Out" - a program that promotes resiliency in children - tells us that "Exploring children's thoughts and feelings through picture books can be a pleasurable, indirect and safe way to help children articulate their beliefs and imagine positive outcomes for the challenges they face." (*Using Literature to Promote Children's Resilience*, Jennifer Pearson & Darlene Kordich Hall. Fall 2007. *Interaction*, 14-15.) When we read picture books, and then ask or comment on the feelings and actions of the story characters, we free children to talk aloud about the emotions and ideas they experience too.

Every night Madison's dad reads to his daughter. They started reading "The Kissing Hand" by Audrey Penn in September. Madison loved the story. Chester, the racoon, was a lot like her. He was afraid to go to school for the first time too. Madison selected "The Kissing Hand" to read night after night. Madison's dad was good at helping Madison talk about the book. He asked her things like, "What do you think Chester is thinking in his head?" "I wonder what Chester's mom is thinking in her head." "She looks worried." Their story time chats helped Madison understand her feelings about being separated from her mom.

When Madison's dad mused aloud, "I wonder what Chester will do to make things better?" an idea formed in Madison's mind. Madison knew what Chester did. She could do that too. On a piece of paper, Madison traced the outline of her hand. Next she cut a heart shape from red construction paper. Madison glued the heart onto the middle of the outline to create a kissing hand of her own. In red crayon Madison printed two big "M"s - one for Mommy and one for Madison. Together, Madison and her dad mailed it to her mom.

Picture books are valuable resources for nurturing resilience in children. Visit <http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-booksKids.htm> for book lists perfect for toddlers, preschoolers and young children.