

Emotional Emergency Packs: Resilience & Reading

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Scaredy the Squirrel was afraid to leave his tree:
“The unknown can be a scary place for a squirrel...
In Scaredy Squirrel’s nut tree, every day is the same.
Everything is predictable. All is under control.”

– Melanie Watt, *Scaredy Squirrel* (see Raising Readers Recommends)

BEING CAUTIOUS IS a natural response to a sometimes overwhelming world. Once we figure out where we are comfortable, we tend to stay there – just like Scaredy Squirrel, hunkered down in his nut tree. Unfortunately, most of us aren’t able to choose whether or not to stay hunkered down where we are comfortable. Sometimes we are forced to leave our “trees,” psychologically or physically. This is especially true of children. From starting school to dealing with the death of a grandparent—kids are constantly confronted with unknowns.

Scaredy Squirrel knew that he might be asked to confront “the unknown” one day. He thought he was prepared: he had his emergency pack ready, filled with bandages and calamine lotion. Unfortunately, when his perch was invaded by an angry bee, he fell out of the tree without his pack.

Children need to have access to emotional emergency packs. Adjusting to an unfamiliar setting can be a difficult experience for a child. When children experience high levels of unbuffered stress, it impacts their development and ability to learn. Dr. Jack Shonkoff, Director of the Center of the Developing Child at Harvard University, points out:

“Research on the biology of stress offers potential explanations for some of the underlying reasons for disparities in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health.”

Pediatric providers can help parents support their children and teach them coping skills, enabling them to develop their emotional emergency packs. Instead of calamine lotion and bandages, pediatric providers can prescribe flexibility and resiliency. Flexible, resilient children experience much softer landings when tumbling from nut trees.

How can we help kids add flexibility and resiliency to their emotional emergency packs? We can begin with books. Books allow us to share important information. If a child is beset by bedtime fears, we can suggest *Can’t You Sleep, Little Bear?* (see **Raising Readers Recommends**). If kids have ailing elderly grandparents, we can steer them towards *Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs*. Books such as *Go Away, Big Green Monster* give children a way to rehearse working with scary situations, while books like *I’m Not Scared* provide children with positive role models.

Books like *Scaredy Squirrel* can also provide children with role models who are flexible and resilient. Scaredy survived his fall out of the tree: it turns out he was a flying squirrel. By leaving the nut tree, Scaredy ended up enjoying the unknown he had always feared.

Then Scaredy Squirrel was not such a scaredy squirrel, after all. ■

RESOURCES

Shonkoff, Jack, “The Science of Child Development: A New Lens for Public Health,” PowerPoint presentation, 11-14-07.

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FALL 2008 Emotional Emergency Packs: Resilience & Reading



Raising Readers

A Family Health and Literacy Program
for Maine Children Ages Birth to 5 years

Raising Readers Recommends



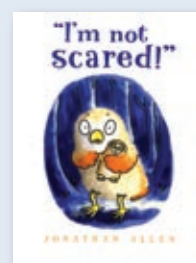
Scaredy Squirrel

by Melanie Watt
(Kids Can Press, 2008)
ISBN: 9781553379591



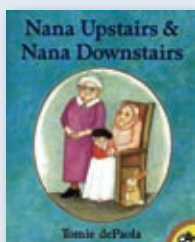
Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?

by Martin Waddell
(Candlewick, 1994)
ISBN-13: 9781564022622



I'm Not Scared

by Jonathan Allen
(Hyperion Books, 2007)
ISBN-13: 9780786837236



Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs

by Tomie de Paula
(Penguin, 2000)
ISBN-13: 978-0698118362



Go Away, Big Green Monster!

by Ed Emberley
(Little, Brown and Company, 1992)
ISBN-13: 9780316236539

Raising Readers has recently developed a “**RAISING READERS RECOMMENDS**” brochure that covers topics from adoption to separation. This brochure will be mailed to health care providers in the late fall.

For more information, go to www.raisingreaders.org.