

# Making a **BRAVE BOOK** for our anxious children

or *Book of Greatness* – helping our children cope when things are a challenge

Anxiety is our brain's natural way of trying to protect us from danger.

When we are anxious, our brain processes things through a filter that notices the threats or dangers, and **magnifies** them. We also tend to *underestimate* our coping ability.

This can make us more avoidant of possible threats than we need to be.

It is important when the threat is real (like avoiding a fire), but anxiety can make our brain feel anxious about other things (like going to school, or to bed, or going to a friend's house).

These anxious feelings are very real and usually cannot be "reasoned" away.

It is not helpful as a parent to protect our children from facing small challenges that make children feel anxious. We need to provide opportunities to show our children that the feared outcome wasn't as bad as expected, and that they can manage. Avoiding perceived dangers can make them feel even more frightening. Facing fears helps grow their braveness and resilience.



When children are anxious, it is hard for them to remember past successes in coping with this stress. This is where the BRAVE BOOK is useful. The aim is to get children to take on brave challenges and to help them remember their past successes in order to help them be even braver in the future.

## **Writing the BRAVE book for our children**

Get a blank book that you can write and draw in, and stick photos in. Let your child decorate it and make it THEIRS. We want to make a book that your child will love.

In this book the parent/caregiver writes for their child about the things they are doing that is a bit hard for them, but they do it anyway.

Write down the thing they have found challenging (like leaving your side when they are at a friend's party, or letting go of your hand in the swimming pool, or saying goodbye to you at preschool) and that they managed to do it. Tell them the how proud you were of them for doing this. Recognize that it was hard for them, but that they did it anyway, and that is how they are growing in braveness.

Remember to be strengths-focussed, rather than focusing on how hard it was them.

Even if there were many tears when you left preschool, just say it was hard for them when you left and they felt sad, but that they were SAFE with the teacher. Tell them they were so brave for letting you leave them at preschool with the teacher. If it took a long time to settle, focus on the fact that they DID MANAGE to calm down and play happily at preschool.

Celebrate all the small (and large) successes and remind them how they coped.

Add to this story as much you can. Each day a new little story could be added about something your child has done that's a bit challenging for them, but that they gave it a go. It is brave to just TRY things.

Make sure to illustrate with photos or pictures to bring it to life. Children love it.

**Remember:**

It takes time to face fears, and usually something scary has to be broken down into small, achievable bits. Start with the smallest and easiest step towards facing the anxiety, and work up from there.

(If your child is afraid of water, they first need to learn to enjoy splashing with their feet and hands before they can put their head into water. Splashing is also brave.)

It is vital to **focus on the successes**. Anxious children are easily discouraged if the challenge seems too big and if we do not celebrate every success they may have.

(If we focus on what they **didn't** do, they will not want to take on more brave challenges.)

Read the story book to your child often, possibly as a bedtime story. This helps your child want to become more brave and add more to their BRAVE book.

Enjoy your child's BRAVE journey with them!

Last night Jack went to Nana's house. Jack stayed with Nana for the whole of dinner time. Jack finds eating at Nana's house hard. Nana cooks different food. Jack sat at the table and ate a small bit of Nana's food. Jack was so very brave for eating Nana's ... (food) and staying at the table. Mum and Dad are so proud of Jack. Jack is becoming so brave with trying new food.

