

Guide to “The Little Kangaroo” story

Dear parent or care-giver,

the story in your hands was written in cooperation with psychologists and special education professionals. Stories like these are called therapeutic stories.

They have specific aims:

- to help children process a difficult experience.
- to remind children that they are skillful and have control over their life, and that there is hope – hope that, one day, life will become bearable and even enjoyable again.

The story can fulfil its aim only with your help, as you are among the closest and most important to the affected children. Please, read these recommendations and advice before reading the story with your child/the child you are caring for.

Read the story in a safe place

This story is intended for children who are, at least temporary, in a safe place. If you are still on the road, or there is no place you can consider your safe haven now, leave this story for later. Naturally, the child is unable to process past experiences, while they are still present in a difficult situation. If you do not have a safe haven yet, reading this story could be exhausting and even distressing. You can read it once you have unpacked your bags and can let yourself rest for at least a couple days somewhere.

Emotions while reading

This story is for children, but it can easily make you emotional as well. You should not fight these feelings. If you do not know how to talk about emotions with your child, you can try using the language in the story. Calmly name the feelings brought up by reading and get to know them. Try not to judge them. No feeling is correct or incorrect in this moment. Remember the sun’s words from the story: **“It is okay to be scared, angry, or even sad. It can get very hard sometimes. But you are not alone.”** Likewise, let the child experience these feelings. You should not try to regulate or guide them in any way.

Reactions to the story

Everybody reacts to the story differently – some feel inspired to draw. That is why the illustrations are black and white, so the story can function as a coloring book. It is completely okay if the child decides to leave the pages uncolored. Some children will want to read the story over and over and have a ton of questions. Others will listen to it and not say anything. All of this is alright. This guide provides useful techniques, which you can use if you or your child get overwhelmed by emotions.

Read to the end

The story is designed so that the conclusion brings hope and closure after difficult times. It is therefore helpful if you do not stop reading it halfway through. You should read to the end, so the tension which can rise up in your child can also be released at the end.

Trust yourself

You know your child best. You are the closest to them. They have survived all this thanks to you. You were by their side, and lead them to safety. Trust your instinct. If you feel they need a hug, give them a hug. If they need to cry, be there for them. And if they are disobedient, do not lecture them more than normally. Reading together and experiencing mutual closeness and support are vital parts of the therapeutic story.

Grounding activities

Emotions, images and heavy thoughts can rise while reading the story, but also at any time during the day.

Therefore, we introduce a grounding technique, which can be used for yourself, your child, or together. They are designed to relieve stress and are suitable for calming. You should only offer these activities to your child, not force them. It is important for the child to understand you are trying to help. They can learn these techniques gradually and use them on their own when needed.

First aid for children overwhelmed by emotion

The situation you have experienced may cause your child to experience symptoms of acute stress syndrome. It can be triggered by a sudden noise, an overflight, an odor, or basically anything. You can see that the child seems to „get stuck“, „shut down“ and does not respond to you at all. They are overwhelmed with stress energy, so their mind is not „here and now“, but „then and there.“ In these situations, you can try to lead your child out of this state. Ideally, you should engage a different sensory channel than the one that is overwhelmed. Movement is used most frequently with children. You can challenge the child for a run, start jumping and shake off the tension. You can also

engage touch and taste. **If your child does not react, try:**

- giving them a piece of chocolate, some candy, an orange or lemon,
- touching them,
- throwing a ball with them (provoking automatic reflex, throw - catch).

Three grounding techniques for emotion regulation

How to offer the child an activity:

“I can see that (describe specific symptoms). I know some techniques that can help you. Let’s try them together. We will do three activities and check how you are feeling at the end. You can either sit or stand during these activities.”

Examples of symptoms:

“I can see that you are having trouble breathing, that you have turned pale, that you are not paying attention to what I am saying, that you are shaking, that something has frightened you.” And so on.

1. Butterfly touch

Cross your arms to let the right hand touch your left shoulder and left hand touch the right shoulder. Alternate tapping your right and left hand on your shoulders. Choose comfortable speed and intensity. Breathe calmly. One cycle should have approximately 20-30 taps. After that, take a deep breath and repeat one more time. Finish with a deep inhale and exhale.

2. Basic grounding

Stand with your feet firmly on the ground. Focus on feeling like you are really standing firmly. Now look around you and find ten items of the same color. After that, deeply inhale and exhale. Now find ten items of the same material. After that, deeply inhale and exhale.

When working with children:

- you can change the tasks when repeating. Find ten items of different color, blue color, made from paper, wood.
- Sometimes you need to improvise. When in a room with a smaller number of items, try finding five blue and five white items.
- Adjust the number of items to the child’s skills.
- Instead of counting in their head, the child lists the items out loud while you show them how many they have named on your fingers.

3. Calming down

Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Pay attention to how you are breathing. While inhaling, imagine the air entering your body and filling your lungs and expanding them until they are full. While exhaling imagine the lungs relaxing, the warmed-up air slowly leaving your body. Repeat.

4. Finishing

Now look at me and show me with your hands how big the discomfort you feel is. If you wish, you can repeat any of the activities.

Shaking

Shaking is a natural reaction that can accompany stress and trauma, so it often occurs in situations when we return to previous difficult experiences in thought or are otherwise reminded of them. It has its biological purpose – the body is producing adrenaline and noradrenaline as a stress response and muscles are getting ready to react. It is not necessary to try to stop the shaking in the moment – it has a purpose, and the body needs it. Similar responses are stuttering or involuntary grimaces.

How to offer the child an activity:

“The little kangaroo and the puppy in our story shook their worries off. You can try seeing what shaking does to your body with me.”

“Try shaking like a dog. A dog starts shaking at the head, and gradually engages the neck, hands, torso, abdomen, buttocks, thighs, and the rest of the legs. Try shaking your whole body off. When finished try focusing on your body. Do you still feel any tension? If yes, shake that place off more strongly. Gradually change the intensity of shaking to feel good in the moment.” Some people like to shake strongly, others very gently. Although this activity is not limited in time, it is good to keep it up for at least 2-3 minutes, or until you get a pleasant feeling.

In conclusion

We believe this guide will help you fulfil the aim of the therapeutic story. This story and guide were created in Slovakia. Everyone who worked on creating it did so without claim to pay. Our goal is to help children and their close ones running from war. Therefore, we waive all copyrights and give permission for free distribution of the story and guide. At www.centrumdys.sk you will find pdf versions in various languages available for free download. We will be pleased to know how far the story has come. Feel free to contact us at pekarovicova@centrumdys.sk

