

44 Children's Books About Mental Health

Best books for helping kids understand emotional and learning challenges

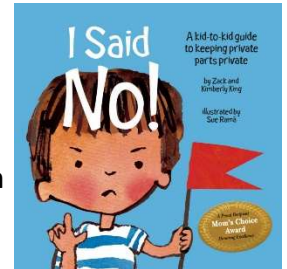
From a hedgehog too anxious to go ice skating to a puppy who can't make his letters come out right, children's books address many emotional, behavioral and learning challenges kids face. These books help kids name and understand feelings and experiences they may be struggling with. At the Child Mind Institute we've contacted publishers all over to call in books that address mental health and learning disorders and other common challenges, like dealing with painful experiences and coping with strong emotions. Our clinicians read them all and picked the best in each category, based on how helpful they found them.

Books about Abuse

I Said No! A Kid-to-Kid Guide to Keeping Private Parts Private

Written by Zach and Kimberly King, illustrated by Sue Rama

This clever book helps kids understand boundaries, using "red flag" and "green flag" terminology. "It reviews a lot of classic scenarios in simple language," says an expert from the Child Mind Institute. Ages 4-8. Published by Boulden Publishing.

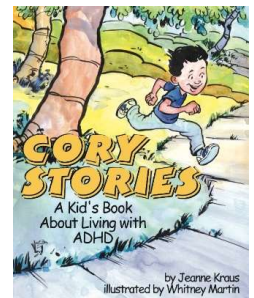


Books about ADHD

Cory Stories: A Kid's Book About Living With ADHD

Written by Jeanne Kraus, illustrated by Whitney Martin

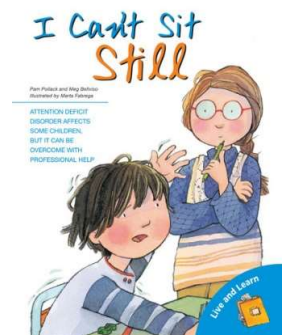
Cory tells readers about himself in this picture book with black-and-white illustrations. Cory says that sometimes kids make fun of him and he isn't sure why. "Sometimes my whole body falls off the chair!" But readers also learn that Cory has persevered, concentrating in karate class, making friends at bowling club, and helping other kids with math. The important parting message: "Nobody needs to be good at everything. But I found out that I am good at a lot of things." Ages 6-11. Published by Magination Press.



I Can't Sit Still! Living With ADHD

Written by Pam Pollack and Meg Belviso, illustrated by Marta Fabrega

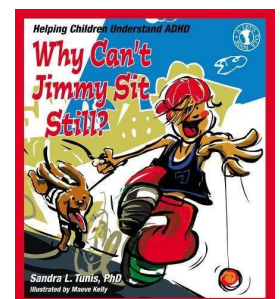
In this picture book's first-person account, Lucas learns that ADHD is the reason he shouts out the answer to math problems in class and has a hard time following the rules in kickball. His doctor gives him medicine and strategies that help him improve. "It provides a clear explanation of common symptoms and interventions in kid-friendly terms," says an expert from the Child Mind Institute. You'll also appreciate the parent's guide at the end of the book. Ages 5-9. Published by B.E.S. Publishing.



Why Can't Jimmy Sit Still?

Written by Sandra L. Tunis, PhD, illustrated by Maeve Kelly

Seven-year-old Jimmy shouts out answers at school, gets carried away at recess, and is distracted when he's doing homework. He doesn't understand why he can't settle down until his parents take him to the doctor and he finds out he has ADHD. This book is written by a psychologist who discusses common symptoms in an age-appropriate way and makes it clear that ADHD isn't a child's fault. Ages 4-8. Published by New Horizon Press.

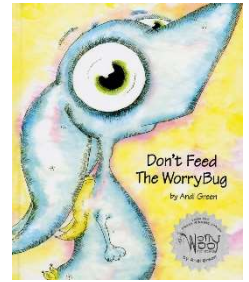


Books about Anxiety

Don't Feed the WorryBug

Written and illustrated by Andi Green

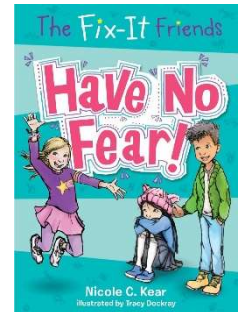
In this whimsical rhyming book, Wince, the monster of worries, learns that the more he worries, the more the pesky WorryBug grows. Eventually the WorryBug grows so big that it can't be ignored, and Wince knows he needs to do something. The book does a good job of illustrating how anxiety can become overwhelming and teaches kids how they can take charge of their anxiety. Ages 3-8. Published by Monsters in My Head.



The Fix-It Friends: Have No Fear!

Written by Nicole C. Kear, illustrated by Tracy Dockray

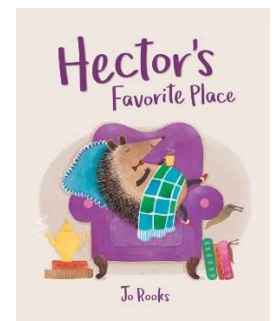
Seven-year-old Veronica wants to help her classmate Maya conquer her fear of bugs, which is preventing her from playing at recess. Veronica comes up with a step-by-step plan that starts with drawing a spider. "Showing gradual exposure to anxieties is a great approach," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Ages 7-10. Published by Imprint.



Hector's Favorite Place

Written and illustrated by Jo Rooks

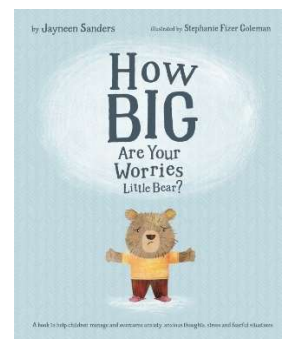
A cute hedgehog turns down ice-skating and playing in the snow with his animal friends because of his worries. "What if he had forgotten how to skate? He could fall and hurt himself." When Hector receives a fun invitation to the Winter Forest Party, he hesitates for a while, and then realizes that he has to be brave. "It's an adorable story," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. "I like that Hector does a little more, and then a little more, and so on." Ages 4-8. Published by Magination Press.



How Big Are Your Worries Little Bear?

By Jayneen Sanders, illustrated by Stephanie Fizer Coleman

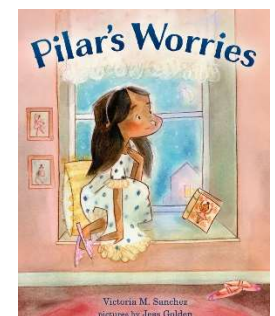
Anxious about school, soccer practice, and monsters under his bed, baby bear worried day and night, despite his family telling him to stop worrying. But when his mom began encouraging him to talk about and even draw out his worries, the feelings began to subside. "I like that the book emphasizes the importance of sharing your thoughts and feelings," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Another plus: The book suggests questions that you can ask your child as you're reading together. Ages 6-10. Published by Educate2Empower Publishing.



Pilar's Worries

Written by Victoria M. Sanchez, illustrated by Jess Golden

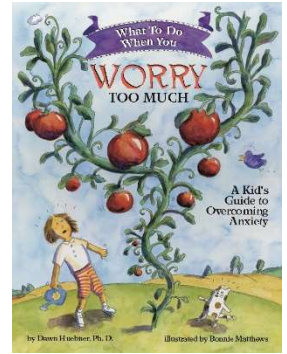
In this new picture book, Pilar lives and breathes ballet — she even does pliés while brushing her teeth. But auditioning for the winter ballet performance makes her feel scared, and she almost doesn't go. By using smart coping techniques, like positive thinking and talking with her friends, she's able to overcome her fears. Bravo! Ages 4-8. Published by Albert Whitman & Company.



What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety

Written by Dawn Huebner, illustrated by Bonnie Matthews

Designed for kids and parents to read together, this nine-chapter behavior therapy workbook covers topics like "How Do Worries Get Started?" and "Keeping Worries Away." Suggestions include relaxation exercises and setting up a designated "Worry Time." Several pages encourage kids to draw or write about their worries. The brilliant final page requests that kids draw a picture of themselves without worries. Ages 6-12. Published by Magination Press.



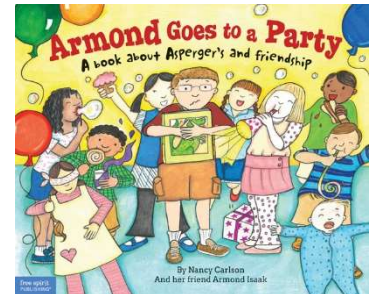
Books about Autism

Armond Goes to a Party: A Book About Asperger's and Friendship

Written by Nancy Carlson and Armond Isaak, illustrated by Nancy Carlson

Co-written by a boy with Asperger's, this picture book "gives a simple understanding of why children with Asperger's struggle to attend parties, and talks about the importance of learning flexibility," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Readers may relate to Armond's fear of balloons popping and not being able to think of anything to say. In the end, Armond admits to his mom that the party was hard, but he's glad he went. Ages 4-8.

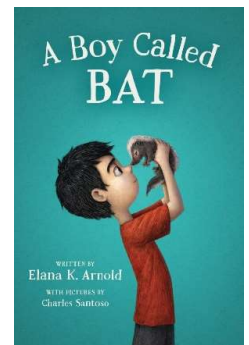
Published by Free Spirit Publishing.



A Boy Called Bat

Written by Elana K. Arnold, illustrated by Charles Santoso

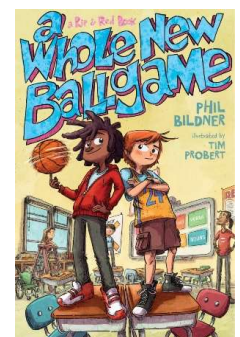
On the surface, it's a sweet boy-wants-pet story. Bixby's (aka Bat's) mom is a veterinarian, and she brings home a baby skunk that he desperately wants to keep. But readers with autism may relate to chatter about itchy and uncomfortable clothes, sticking with routines, and only having friends who are grown-ups. "It does a wonderful job of describing the day-to-day experience of high-functioning children with ASD," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Ages 6-10. Published by Walden Pond Press.



A Whole New Ballgame: A Rip and Red Book

Written by Phil Bildner, illustrated by Tim Probert

In the first book of a series, best friends Rip and Red have just started fifth grade. Red has autism, and Rip doesn't. Their common passion: basketball. Many chapters like "Hoops Madness" and "Bulldozed and Blitzed" focus on their adventures on the school's b-ball team. "It's not a book that's obviously about autism," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. "It's a fun, lighthearted story with characters that will seem very relatable to tweens." Ages 8-12. Published by Square Fish.



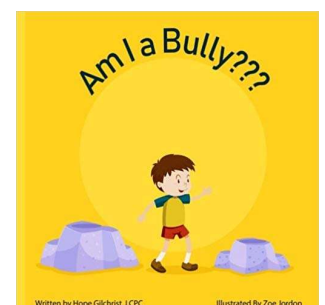
Books about Bullying

Am I a Bully?

Written by Hope Gilchrist, illustrated by Zoe Jordan

Toby makes his friends laugh when he teases a classmate over his weird clothes. He's just trying to be funny and he isn't beating anyone up, so he can't be a bully, can he? This independently published paperback helps children recognize when teasing crosses the line into bullying. Ages 6-9.

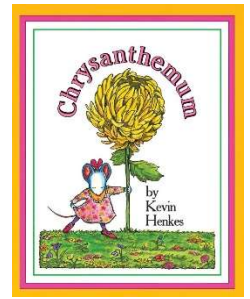
Pub. by CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.



Chrysanthemum

Written and illustrated by Kevin Henkes

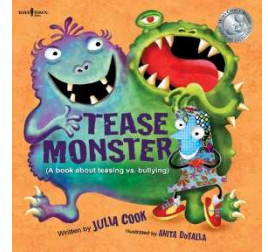
This sweet story prepares kids for how short-lived teasing can be. On the first day of school, Victoria picks on Chrysanthemum because she has the same name as a flower, and Chrysanthemum wilts under the ridicule. Then the students learn that a teacher has a similar name, and all of a sudden Chrysanthemum is cool. Ages 4-8. Pub. by Mulberry Books.



Tease Monster: A Book About Teasing vs. Bullying

Written by Julia Cook, illustrated by Anita DuFalla

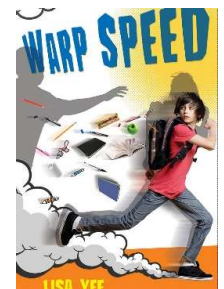
Particularly good for an anxious or literal child, this rhyming book helps distinguish between teasing and bullying. "There are two types of teasing: the nice and the mean," Cook writes. "You think that everyone's against you, but it's not like it seems." Readers will learn strategies for responding to both good-natured teasing and bullying. Ages 5-10. Published by Boys Town Press.



Warp Speed

Written by Lisa Yee

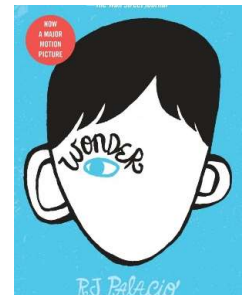
In a fast-paced chapter book that will appeal to reluctant readers, Marley thinks seventh grade will be boring until he draws attention from the school bully. Digger pushes Marley down in the hallway, and the drama unfolds. "It's a very relatable story for kids who feel like outsiders," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Bonus: If your child is a fan of Star Wars, there are loads of references. Ages 8-12. Published by Arthur A. Levine Books.



Wonder

Written by R.J. Palacio Ages 8+

In this popular chapter book that spurred the "Choose Kind" movement in classrooms, a boy with a facial deformity switches to a mainstream school for the fifth grade and is bullied. "But he has a strong network of family and friends to help him overcome bullying," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Pub.by Knopf Books for Young Readers.

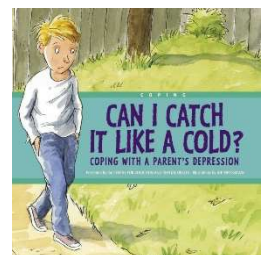


Books about Depression

Can I Catch It Like a Cold? Coping With a Parent's Depression

Written by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, illustrated by Joe Weissmann

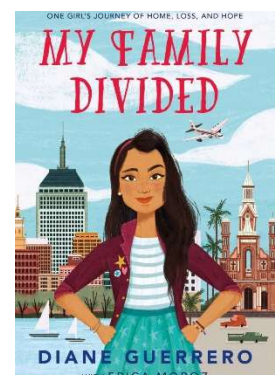
Alex's dad doesn't work anymore and just wants to sleep all the time. When Alex finds out why, that he's suffering from depression, he confides in his friend Anna. She tells him that her mom has depression too, and she sees a therapist to help her feel better. "I like that it promotes the benefits of therapy for the entire family," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Ages 7-12. Published by Tundra Books.



My Family Divided: One Girl's Journey of Home, Loss, and Hope

Written by Diane Guerrero with Erica Moroz

An actress on TV shows such as *Orange Is the New Black*, Guerrero shares the heartbreaking story of her Colombian parents being deported when she was 14. She also reveals how she battled depression, and had suicidal thoughts in her early 20s. "I wanted so badly to prove that I could take care of myself. That I didn't need anyone. That I was grown-up," she writes. Ages 12+. Published by Henry Holt and Co.

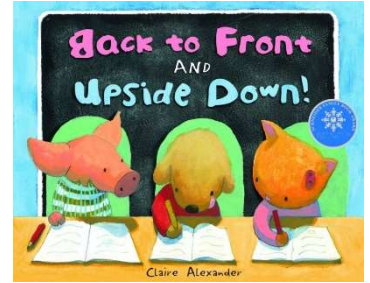


Books about Dyslexia

Back to Front and Upside Down!

Written and illustrated by Claire Alexander

This sweet picture book follows Stan, a puppy, and his animal classmates. Stan's letters come out "back to front and upside down, and some didn't look like letters at all," but he's afraid to ask his teacher for help because he thinks the other kids will laugh at him. When he finally does, he learns that with help — and lots of practice — he can succeed. "The book sends the positive message that things will get better with a bit of hard work," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Ages 4-8. Published by Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.



Fish in a Tree

Written by Lynda Mullaly Hunt

This inspirational chapter book captures the challenges students with dyslexia face daily, not just in reading but in self-esteem. The main character, Ally, has been able to hide her inability to read in every school — until now. "The arc of the story changes when Ally makes friends and finally finds a teacher who recognizes her struggles and how smart she is," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Ages 8-12. Published by Puffin Books.

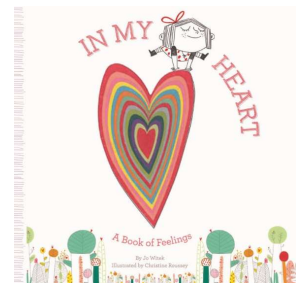


Books about Feelings

In My Heart: A Book of Feelings

Written by Jo Witek, illustrated by Christine Roussey

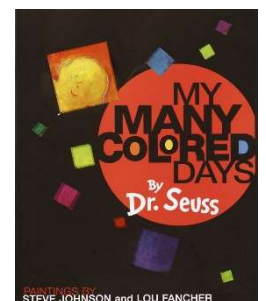
In this sturdy book with beautiful heart-shaped cutouts, a girl explains that her heart is full of feelings. Each spread focuses on a different emotion, such as happiness, bravery, and fear. The descriptions of the feelings are particularly engaging: "Some days my heart feels as heavy as an elephant. There's a dark cloud over my head and tears fall like rain. This is when my heart is sad." Ages 3-6. Published by Harry N. Abrams.



My Many Colored Days

Written by Dr. Seuss, illustrated by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher

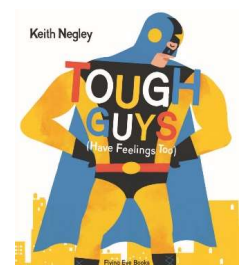
This little-known Dr. Seuss story gives young kids a groundwork for describing their feelings, normalizing the experience of having multiple emotions. Bonus: It will also help toddlers and preschoolers learn colors. Ages 3-5. Published by Knopf Books for Young Readers.



Tough Guys (Have Feelings Too)

Written and illustrated by Keith Negley

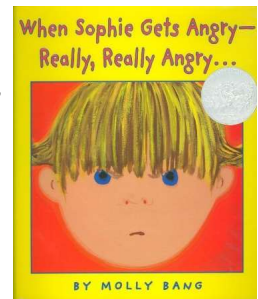
The witty illustrations in this book may be even more powerful than the text. Kids will see various "tough guys" showing emotion. An astronaut in space holds a picture of his family. A wrestler cries in the locker room. A tattooed biker regrets running over a squirrel. The final image of a father and son is particularly heartwarming. Ages 3-6. Published by Flying Eye Books.



When Sophie Gets Angry — Really, Really Angry...

Written and illustrated by Molly Bang

When Sophie's sister swipes her stuffed animal, she feels ready to explode "like a volcano." Vibrant illustrations depict Sophie kicking, screaming, and even roaring. But then the color palette of the illustrations changes as Sophie cries a little and lets the outdoors comfort her. "This book normalizes anger and shows that it doesn't last forever," says an expert from the Child Mind Institute. Ages 4-8. Pub. by Scholastic Paperbacks.

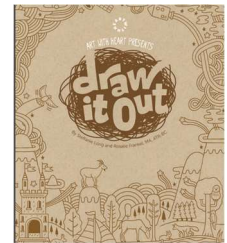


Books about Grief and Loss

Art With Heart Presents: Draw It Out

Written by Steffanie Lorig and Rosalie Frankel Ages 6-10

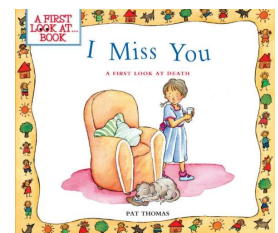
This 40-plus-page activity book uses writing and drawing to help kids work through their emotions. Activities include creating a "Circle of Strength" and using a calendar to express feelings on different days. "I use this book in therapy for grieving children and find it to be extremely effective," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Pub. by Art With Heart.



I Miss You: A First Look at Death

Written by Pat Thomas, illustrated by Lesley Harker

This book explains, in realistic but reassuring language, why people die and how hard it can be to say goodbye. The real genius: "What About You?" boxes scattered throughout the book that contain questions you can ask children. "I particularly like that it normalizes the sad feelings around death," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Ages 4-8. Published by B.E.S. Publishing.



The Invisible String

Written by Patrice Karst, illustrated by Joanne Lew-Vriethoff Ages 3-8

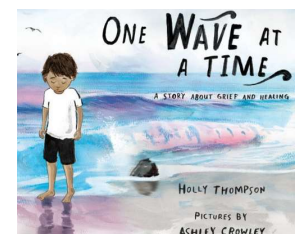
This bestselling picture book introduces little ones to the concept of an invisible link between people, even when they're separated. In the story, a mom explains to her children that there is a "very special string made of love" that connects them to everyone they love. The story continues with explaining how far the string reaches even to a beloved relative in heaven. Pub. by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.



One Wave at a Time: A Story About Grief and Healing

Written by Holly Thompson, illustrated by Ashley Crowley

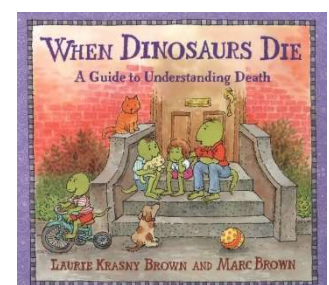
After Kai's dad died, the boy's grief manifests itself in many ways, from crying to throwing a fit to feeling flat and robotic. "The story line shows the change from struggling to recovering, and emphasizes using support networks," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Ages 4-8. Published by Albert Whitman & Company.



When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death

Written and illustrated by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown

With simple language and sweet drawings that aren't too graphic, this picture book addresses many questions children have about death, how people say goodbye, and how we remember people we've lost. The best section focuses on feelings about death and encourages kids to talk about them, says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Ages 5-9. Published by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

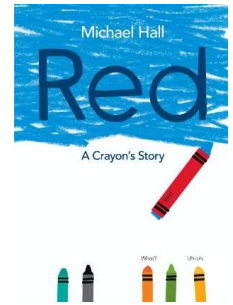


Books about Identity

Red: A Crayon's Story

Written and illustrated by Michael Hall

Your child will pick up on the problem right away: A blue crayon is mistakenly labeled red. He can't do what everyone expects of him (and other crayons give him all kinds of advice about how to be a better red) until one day he meets a purple crayon who sees his true color. Then he soars. "The message about identity is great," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Ages 5-10. Published by Greenwillow Books.

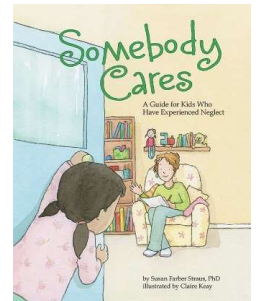


Books about Neglect

Somebody Cares: A Guide for Kids Who Have Experienced Neglect

Written by Susan Farber Straus, PhD, illustrated by Claire Keay

This book puts into words a lot of what kids who experienced neglect feel but have a hard time expressing. A particularly poignant passage: "I tried to be strong and brave, but often I was worried and scared. I tried to do the best with what I had, but sometimes I needed more." Eventually, a social worker and therapist intervene, and the story ends sweetly. Ages 6-12. Published by Magination Press.

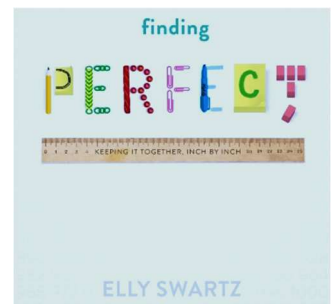


Books about OCD

Finding Perfect

Written by Elly Swartz Ages 9-14

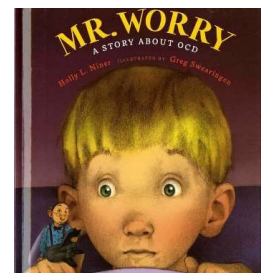
In this moving chapter book, 12-year-old Molly Nathan struggles with undiagnosed OCD as she navigates middle school friendships and life without her mom, who has temporarily relocated for a job. Early on, many of Molly's OCD tendencies, like organizing takeout menus alphabetically and looking for the patterns in phone numbers, are casually woven into a story line that focuses on her desire to win the poetry slam so her mom will come home for the banquet. But, as time passes, her OCD worsens. When Molly becomes fixated on counting, her dad takes her to a doctor who provides her diagnosis. Pub. by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.



Mr. Worry: A Story About OCD

Written by Holly L. Niner, illustrated by Greg Swearingen

Before he goes to sleep, Kevin asks his mom the same questions over and over and lines things up neatly so "his mind doesn't get sweaty." By the end of the story, Kevin's OCD has improved thanks to therapy and medication. Ages 7-12. Published by Albert Whitman & Company.

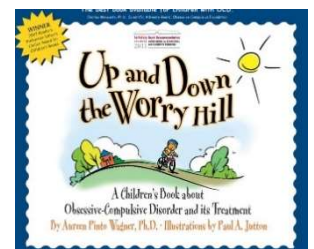


Up and Down the Worry Hill:

A Children's Book About Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Its Treatment

Written by Aureen Pinto Wagner, PhD, illustrated by Paul A. Jutton

This story about a young boy with OCD explains, in child-friendly language, not only what the disorder is and how it interferes with his life, but how treatment with cognitive behavior therapy works to help kids escape it. It's best read with your child. Ages 7-10. Published by Lighthouse Press.

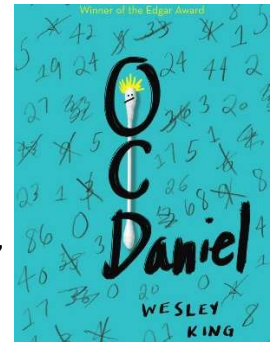


OCDaniel

Written by Wesley King

This YA book combines a coming-of-age tale with a mystery novel. The protagonist is 13-year-old Daniel, who hides his “zaps” — rearranging cups into geometric patterns, tying his shoes a lot, and counting things — from other kids at school and at football practice. Written in the first person, “this book does an excellent job of describing the stigma and has a very accurate description of how obsessions and compulsions take hold,” says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Eventually, Daniel discovers that he has OCD, moves toward self-acceptance, and helps a friend solve a mystery. Ages 12+.

Published by Simon & Schuster/Paula Wiseman Books.



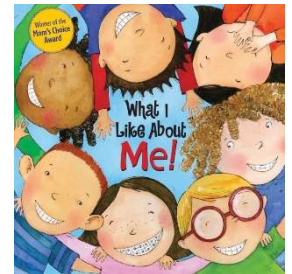
Books about Self-Esteem

What I Like About Me!

Written by Allia Zobel Nolan, illustrated by Miki Sakamoto

In this simple book for young children, students at school celebrate their diversity from braces to glasses, curly hair to big feet. “It provides a very positive message about the benefit of those differences,” says an expert at the Child Mind Institute.

Ages 3-7. Published by Studio Fun International.

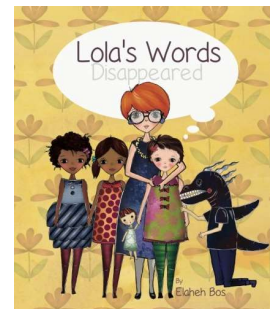


Books about Selective Mutism

Lola's Words Disappeared

Written and illustrated by Elaheh Bos

This book helps readers understand that kids can be super verbal at home, but, in public, words seem to get stuck. Lola, the main character, couldn't say a word at school. But a gradual approach, starting by practicing with a school friend at home, enabled her to find her voice. Ages 5-8. Pub. by CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.



Books about Sensory Processing

Stanley Will Probably Be Fine

Written by Sally J. Pla, illustrated by Steve Wolfhard

In this funny chapter book, middle-schooler Stanley is on a mission to get VIP passes to Comic Fest, which means he has to win the Trivia Quest treasure hunt happening downtown. He's great with comic trivia, but his sensory sensitivities and anxiety can sometimes get in the way. With the help of a brave new neighbor and a superhero that he invents, Stanley finds the courage he needs. Ages 8-12. Published by HarperCollins.

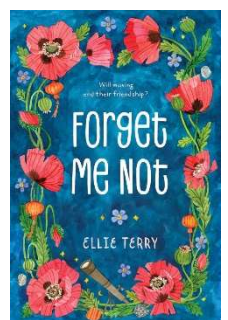


Books about Tourette's Syndrome

Forget Me Not

Written by Ellie Terry

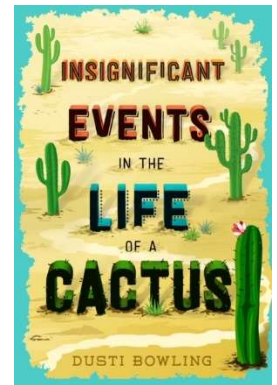
Toggling between verse and prose, this book is written from the points of view of two students: Calli, who has Tourette's Syndrome, and her classmate Jinsong. Most students tease and reject Calli because of her tics. Readers will be satisfied by the end of the story when Calli begins to stand up for herself and find confidence, says an expert at the Child Mind 8-12. Published by Square Fish.



Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus

Written by Dusti Bowling

Born without arms, the main character, Aven, makes friends with Conner, a classmate who has Tourette's Syndrome. Their relationship gives readers a window into life with a disability through honest (and sometimes funny) dialogue. One example: "Conner had gone to two support group meetings, and I got the feeling he was actually starting to enjoy them, even though he gave Dexter the stink eye." Overall, the book does a good job of explaining Tourette's Syndrome and the types of treatment, notes an expert at the Child Mind Institute. Ages 12+. Published by Sterling Children's Books.

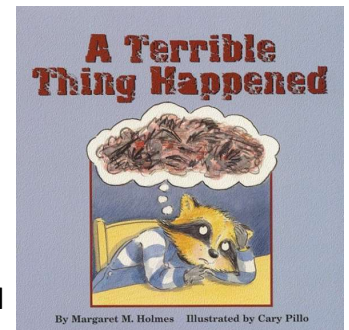


Books about Trauma

A Terrible Thing Happened

Written by Margaret M. Holmes, illustrated by Cary Pillo

When Sherman, a raccoon, saw something that upset him, he became nervous, didn't sleep well, and felt sad. "Through Sherman, the book explains the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in simple terms that young children can understand," says an expert at the Child Mind Institute. "The book also covers the importance of talking about traumatic things to help feel better." Another plus: The story doesn't specify exactly what happened to Sherman, so the book could be useful in many situations. Ages 5-9. Published by Magination Press.



The War That Saved My Life

By Kimberly Brubaker Bradley

During World War II, 10-year-old Ava escapes her traumatic life with her mom and goes to the countryside, where she learns to ride a pony and read. But in the country she is still struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder; for instance, going into a bomb shelter reminds her of being locked in a kitchen cabinet in her mom's apartment. Because of some mature language and themes, it's better read with your child. Ages 9-12. Published by Puffin Books.

