

BOOK REVIEW

CONFIDENT KIDS JANET HALL (1993)

Victoria: Lothian Publishing (03 645 1544) \$16.95

The philosophy that underlies the message of this book is that the best teachers of children are their parents and that the best protection against fearful events is education, understanding, and communication. Consequently, this book is designed primarily for parents, to help them empower their children to cope with common childhood fears such as fears of the dark, of being abducted, and of dogs. The book may also be of interest to clinicians as reading material to give to parents and children as an adjunct to clinic based interventions.

The book is divided into two sections. Part I is written specifically for parents and discusses from a social learning perspective the nature and causes of children's fears, how parents can perpetuate children's fears, and practical strategies for helping children to overcome their fears. Preventive and curative strategies are described and each strategy is illustrated with case studies and exemplars. Specifically, the book demonstrates how fears can be overcome with simple, practical strategies available to all parents, such as confidence building activities and the use of self-talk, and rewards.

Part II is written in simple language such that many young children can read it for themselves. Here, the child is provided with basic information about the causes, symptoms, and treatment of fears. Three case studies describe how children who were scared of burglars, bogey men, and big black dogs used the "fear buster" strategies to become brave. Each story explains how the child learnt to be scared and then outlines how each child successfully applied strategies to reduce their fear. The final chapter prompts the child to develop an individual "fear buster plan" for their own particular fear, by providing

checklists and prompt lists for implementing coping strategies. A "fear buster supreme" certificate is included for children who successfully overcome a fear.

The text is clearly written and provides practical strategies for both parents and children. Throughout the text, warnings or clarifications are presented to ensure that the reader has understood the message from the preceding section. The use of illustrations and simple, easy-to-follow strategies for handling fear serve to reassure children that the experience of childhood fears is not uncommon and that strategies are available to enable them to feel more confident and more able to cope with fears. Perhaps, more varied exemplars could have been used throughout the text to help parents and children generalise the strategies to a wider variety of fears instead of focusing on only three, albeit common, fears.

As with most self-help books, "Confident Kids" is likely to be of greatest benefit to motivated parents, especially with children whose fears are not longstanding. Clinicians are also likely to find it useful as an information source for parents who request help for their child's fears. It is a practical and informative resource which empowers parents to become more skilled in understanding, managing, and preventing fears in children. Parents can subsequently encourage their own children to deal with their fears in a relaxed and constructive way. Overall, it is a valuable self-help book for parents wishing to take an active approach to their children's fears.

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