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## psychiatry in the movies

### *Inside Out*: education or simply entertainment?

Hannah Marcarian and Paul O. Wilkinson

*Inside Out* is a 2015 Pixar computer-animated film set inside the brain of 11-year-old girl Riley. The film tries to provide an insight into the workings of a child's mind and so has the potential to be educational for children in their understanding of emotional balance. Riley's emotions – Joy, Anger, Disgust, Fear and Sadness – are characters that control her actions via the Control Centre of her brain, with Joy their leader. When we meet the first four emotions, they tell us their clear role in Riley's life. However, Sadness seems to have no purpose and Joy tries to sideline her as much as possible.

Riley is a happy child until a significant life event occurs: moving from Minnesota to San Francisco. We see difficult changes happen in Riley's real life: moving away from her friends and hockey team, moving to a smaller house, her parents being stressed and finding it hard to make friends at her new school. Her mum asks her to keep up a happy face, to help them all to cope better. Riley (and Joy) try to do this. Unsurprisingly, this attempt to be happy when life is problematic is a real struggle. We see the battle in the Control Centre, predominantly between Joy and Sadness. Sadness tries to make a 'core memory' of a difficult event at school. This is horrifying to Joy, who thinks all core memories should be positive. This battle leads to Joy and Sadness both being sucked out of the Control Centre.

The film then portrays what life is like without Joy and Sadness. Other emotions control Riley, principally Anger, reflecting how young people's sadness often presents as anger (in fact, DSM allows irritability to be a core symptom of paediatric depression, instead of sadness). Life continues to go badly and Riley's parents struggle to understand her; they see her as a moody teenager who needs to be disciplined, which sometimes happens with parents adolescents with depression. Relationships deteriorate and Anger makes Riley plan to run away from home, rather than attempting more constructive actions.

Joy and Sadness try to make their way back to the Control Centre. Initially, Joy is exasperated with Sadness who wants to 'obsess over the weight of life's problems', and tries to leave her behind. This is despite Sadness making some sensible suggestions, like not following Bing Bong, Riley's rather foolish imaginary friend, into a dangerous place when warning signs say keep out – of course, optimistic Joy decides they should go in anyway. Over time, Joy finds that she cannot return without Sadness and begins to realise Sadness is helpful, after watching her comfort Bing Bong. Sadness allows him to feel sad and listens, which makes him feel better. Joy recalls a happy core memory that actually had an aspect of sadness: Riley's team had lost, but when her parents saw her feeling sad, they knew they needed to comfort her, helping her to feel happy. Joy and Sadness eventually return to the Control Centre where Joy sees that Riley is running away to Minnesota and invites Sadness to take control. Riley feels sad and this motivates her to return to her worried parents. They hug their daughter, who cries while explaining her feelings. They acknowledge that the move has been hard for Riley, validating her.

While not about mental illness, the film helps educate children about how to deal with feelings. Sadness is real, we can't get rid of it and trying to suppress it leads to other problems. Allowing sadness to be expressed can let other people help us. Hopefully, it also teaches parents to listen to their children at times of big family changes, especially if they seem angry.

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