

Dandelions and Orchids

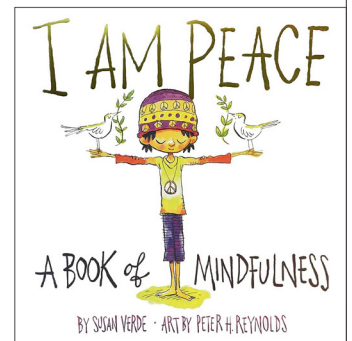
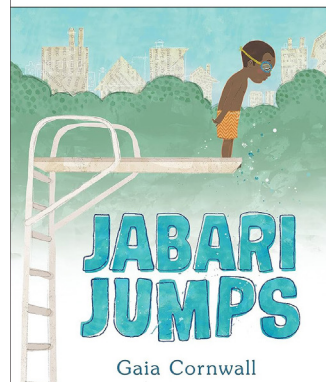
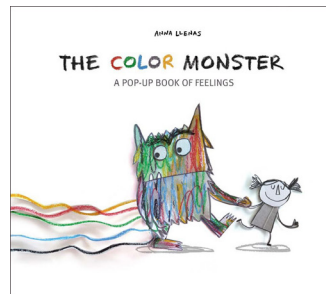
Finding Picture Books to Support Youth Facing Fear and Anxiety

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Pediatrician and researcher W. Thomas Boyce described children as falling into two essential camps when it comes to anxiety—they're either dandelions or orchids.¹ Dandelion children, like the plant, are resistant to stress and anxiety and tend to thrive in variable conditions. Orchid children are more sensitive and need additional support and specific skills to flourish in various environments.

Throughout the world, our collective society has been experiencing a state of insecurity, uncertainty, and grief, and millions of children are facing mental health challenges as a result. In this environment, even those resilient dandelion children can benefit from increasing their social and emotional literacy skills and developing coping techniques as levels of stress and anxiety continue to rise.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stressed that, "Learning to cope with stress in a healthy way will help you, the people you care about, and those around you become more resilient."² The organization has also provided a list of healthy ways that children can cope with anxiety which



include "having a healthy eating plan," "participating in physical activity," getting enough sleep, and "practicing mindfulness and relaxation techniques."³ These are practices that both adults and children can learn and adapt into their lives, and research suggests that engaging with picture books can help them do that. In writing about resources to help support children's emotional well-being during the COVID-19 outbreak, Bartlett, Griffin, and Thomson noted that, "Children tend to rely on their imaginations when they lack adequate information."⁴ Children's engagement with picture books allows them to use their imaginations to develop solutions to their problems. Research has documented the role that picture books can play in helping children learn to cope,⁵ deal with anxiety,⁶ and develop resilience.⁷ Picture books have the ability to mirror a child's own experience while also showing them a window into what is possible and acting as a sliding glass door to empower children to act.⁸

With this potential in mind, we applied for the Carnegie Whitney Grant sponsored by the American Library Association to develop a web-based bibliography of picture books about dealing with anxiety called *We're All Orchids Now: A Bibliography of Children's*



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Picture Books About Dealing with Anxiety, 2010–2022. Our aim was to identify resources that could provide children with a safe and comfortable way to learn about anxiety, realize they aren't alone in their feelings, and learn how to cope with that anxiety in a healthy way. Children and the adults in their lives need these resources now, and our hope is to connect them with quality, informative picture books at this great time of need and in the future, when additional personal or social stressors arise.

We reviewed 407 picture books published between 2010 and 2022 that had the subject term “anxiety” or related terms such as “worry” and “stress.” Of that sample, we determined that 267 books were appropriate for the bibliography. A review, including suggestions for how the book might be used, was developed for each of those books.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits of children's direct engagement with picture books, we feel that librarians, educators, parents, guardians, and counselors can also use picture books to help start conversations about anxiety with children. To help facilitate adults' use of this bibliography, we considered the extent to which each book demonstrated the RULER skills for social emotional learning (SEL).⁹ The RULER acronym stands for: **recognizing** emotion in self and others; **understanding** the causes and consequences of emotions; **labeling** emotions accurately; **expressing** emotions appropriately; and **regulating** emotions effectively. Library staff might use this list to find books that

incorporate SEL components to include in displays or read-alouds about other themes.

School and public libraries may also find this list helpful as a selection tool when looking for high quality picture books to add to their collections. Library staff may also consider this bibliography useful in helping guide parents to quality picture books for their children. Finally, this list can be helpful for librarians who are in the position to practice non-therapeutic bibliotherapy by providing access to books that may help their patrons at their point of need.

An additional way in which we have attempted to make these reviews helpful to users is that we have classified these books as being either appropriate for preschool-aged children or school-aged children. It is true, however, that many of these books can be used with children of various ages, and even teens and adults. The bibliography can be found at <https://mls.appstate.edu/picture-books-about-dealing-anxiety>. Libraries and other youth-centered organizations are welcome to link directly to the bibliography as a resource for patrons and clients.

As the CDC has noted, the mental and physical stress being felt by people all over the world due to the COVID-19 outbreak and other events is a public health crisis.¹⁰ While there is no easy solution, children who feel stress can engage with picture books to learn how to deal with their anxiety in a healthy way, thus giving them a toolkit of practices they'll be able to use for the rest of their lives. &

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