

WHY THE COPING SKILLS BOOKS ARE SO DIFFERENT

These books use metaphorical stories (Fables) to help you and your children understand and remember the therapeutic concepts and techniques. Those are big words for using stories to teach Good Thinking skills. Such an idea is not new and its very "oldness" is the reason it is such a powerful technique.

"The logic of the emotional mind is associative: it takes elements that symbolize a reality, or trigger a memory of it, to be the same as the reality. That is why similes, metaphors, and images speak directly to the emotional mind, as do the arts-novels, poetry, song, theater, and opera. Great spiritual teachers like Buddha and Jesus have touched their disciples' ears by speaking in the language of emotion, teaching in parables, fables and stories. Indeed, religious symbol and ritual makes little sense from the rational point of view; it is couched in the vernacular of the heart."(Goleman, 1995)

We dislike change, even change for the better. We also dislike coming to grips with our personal inadequacies. In order to accomplish the goals of the Coping Skills stories, you will need to do both, thus the need for the fables. The fable characters think irrationally (Stinky), their emotions are too intense or inappropriate (Not OK), and their behavior is self-defeating

(Thumbs Down) just like real life people. These characters also incur the negative consequences of this Stinky, Not Ok, and Thumbs Down sequence.

This method of learning is less threatening than someone pointing out our personal Thumbs Down behavior. We are more receptive to understanding how we are the cause of our own personal problems.

A fable allows you to see a sequence of events from start to finish. You see the situation, the thinking involved, how that thinking generates specific emotions and behaviors, and how those lead to the ultimate consequences. In our real lives, we are aware of only bits and pieces of this sequence.

The goal is for you (and your children) to be able to identify the thinking in a particular situation, evaluate it and anticipate the emotional and behavioral reactions, plus the possible consequences. The fables allow for different "thinking" by the characters that will change the emotional and behavioral reactions and therefore, the consequences. This same process can occur in your everyday life.

Another rationale for using fables is their power to cause you to remember the lessons. In many of the fables, the main character that refuses to change their irrational Stinky Thinking, experiences very negative consequences. Just as in real life, there will be no "happily ever after" for those who have poor coping skills.

You can recognize the obvious sequence leading to disaster in the story, but would never recognize (or admit) a similar event in your real life. With the metaphorical story in your memory, its similarity to your real life difficulties will trigger recognition of your Stinky Thinking and keep you from going down this unproductive path.

Many of us are reluctant to recognize the futility in our habitual reactions to certain situations. We continue in these patterns and resist the most insightful suggestions of others. But metaphorical stories can break that bond, allowing us to consider alternatives which may prove more effective and productive for our happiness.

Philip Barker in *Psychotherapeutic Metaphors* states that we often "get in fixed, ridged patterns of behavior and seem unable to break out of them ... Metaphor can help provide the new perspectives needed. Situations are common in which people keep attempting 'solutions' to problems, but their solutions do not work. A metaphor is a way of offering new choices and new perspectives. These can lead to the resolution of conflict and the solution of many other problems."

These fables are designed to provide you and your children with rational alternatives, which because of their metaphorical nature are more readily accessible than mere rules and expectations.