

Usually at this time of year I would be writing about going back to school or the coming of fall, but this year is obviously not like others. Let's take a moment to acknowledge that things are still crazy. Families are experiencing extreme stress over school, childcare, working-from-home arrangements, or not working at all. We're all running a marathon and we don't know when it will end. But we've made it this far; we will make it through this!

Your kids might be feeling a lot of big feelings these days, especially with the start of a very different school year. This week I have some book suggestions that may help soothe your young kids' worries as they embark on this new adventure.

"My Many Colored Days," by Dr. Seuss, illustrated by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher. You won't find Horton, the Cat in the Hat, or any Sneetches in this Dr. Seuss book. Instead you'll read about how different emotions can feel like different colors, and how you might feel like a different color each day. The feelings described run from pink happy days to yellow busy bee days to growly mad black days. This book is a great tool for helping your child describe their emotions.

"Wemberly Worried," by Kevin Henkes. Wemberly worries about everything, especially the start of school. She can think of a million things, big and small, that might go wrong. Her very teacher introduces her to another student who has a lot of worries, too, and once they meet, they have so much fun together that they forget about all the things that could go wrong. Wemberly's story is a lesson in living in the moment and good friendship.

"I'm Worried" and "I'm Sad" by Michael Ian Black, illustrated by Debbie Ridpath Ohi. These books are a mix of silliness and good advice. The characters in both are a little girl, a flamingo, and a potato. In "I'm Sad," the flamingo is sad and afraid he'll never be happy again, and that his friends won't like him unless he's happy. After trying different ways to cheer up but not quite succeeding, the little girl tells him, "Maybe it's okay to just be sad."

In "I'm Worried," it's the potato who's having a hard time with anxiety. He and the flamingo decide to wrap themselves in bubble wrap to protect themselves from anything bad happening, but then they feel hot and trapped and realize a bad thing happened anyway. Again the little girl comes through with some good advice: "Since we don't know what's going to happen in the future, maybe we should just enjoy the now."

Todd Parr's "The Don't Worry Book" is illustrated with bright, cartoony pictures to show all the things that might cause a kid to worry, and ways to feel better. It also offers a really simple explanation of what worrying is: thinking too much about a problem or being afraid that something bad might happen. This might help a child identify what they're feeling anxious about.

The classic "The Kissing Hand," by Audrey Penn and illustrated by Ruth E. Harper and Nancy M. Leak, offers a way for anxious children to cope with their fears. Chester Raccoon is worried about going to school, but his mother shows him how he can remind himself that she loves him and is always with him when she kisses his hand. Whenever he feels worried he puts his hand to his cheek for a kiss and reassurance.