

READING FRANKIE STORIES WITH CHILDREN

A GUIDE FOR ADULTS

Frankie stories are for children experiencing illness, injury, medical procedures or hospital admissions.

HOW FRANKIE STORIES CAN HELP

Reading regularly with children has many benefits. In times of stress, reading with caring adults can help children feel safe, secure and loved. Frankie stories are designed to:

- Strengthen the connection between a child and caregiver.
- Support children and adults to talk about their medical experience and worries in a safe and supportive way.
- Help children understand and accept difficult real-world experiences.
- Show other children going through similar things and finding ways to cope.
- Help the child understand what happened for them.
- Help clarify any misunderstandings the child may have about their medical experience.
- Encourage children and adults to do the important and often hard work of naming, expressing, and talking about 'big feelings' like sadness, anger or worry.
- Normalise common reactions children may have to medical stress and learn strategies to cope.

PREPARING TO READ

- Watch a video about conversational reading (there's a QR code and link at the end of this Guide).
- Read the story first by yourself to get familiar with the characters, events, and emotions and identify any difficult memories the story might bring up.
- Think about how to adapt the story for your child's age and medical experience.
- Plan to read the story when you are both in a calm, relaxed mood and space.
- Minimise distractions (e.g. turn TV off).
- Get close (e.g. have the child cuddle up next to you).
- Aim to make this a special activity you share together.
- Avoid reading the book before bed unless the child asks to.

READING TOGETHER

- Tell the story your own way. Particularly if the child is very young, they may not understand or concentrate long enough to listen to the whole story. You might want to change some words, tell a shorter story from the pictures, or simply look at the pictures together and point out what you see.
- Spend time looking at each page, pointing out details and asking questions (e.g. 'Where is the doctor?', 'Look, Max was given a Frankie toy like you.')
- If they're old enough, encourage the child to talk about what they're noticing, thinking and feeling.
- Listen closely to what the child has to say about the characters or their own experiences.
- Praise the child for listening and talking about the story.

RELATING THE STORY TO REAL LIFE

- Discuss experiences in the story that are similar to or different from the child's (e.g. 'You went to hospital in an ambulance like Max', 'Have you felt scared, like Sophie?')
- Give the child different ways to act out and talk about their experience, for example toys, dress-ups, drawing, sand, puppets.
- Help the child understand that what happened was not their fault.
- Gently correct any misbeliefs or confusion the child has about their experience (e.g. 'I stayed with you the whole night. You thought you were by yourself because the medicine gave you strange dreams, just like Sophie.') Use the story as a tool to problem-solve any issues they are facing with their medical care.
- Answer questions the child may have, in words that suit their age and understanding.

BIG FEELINGS

It's normal for both children and adults to have some uncomfortable thoughts and feelings while or after reading a Frankie book. You might find some of these strategies helpful:

- If the child seems upset or uncomfortable, direct their attention to safety and security (e.g. 'Max was scared but he's ok now', 'Sophie didn't like hospital but she's home again now', 'Should we give Frankie a cuddle?').
- Take a break. Say something like, 'You seem a bit upset by Max's story. I feel a bit sad too because I think about what happened to you. Let's take a break and look at it again later.' You can also direct the child's attention to other parts of the illustration (e.g. 'Can you point to Frankie?') to give them a little break.
- Give the child chances to share what they're feeling, if they want to.
- If the child sees you getting upset, that's ok. Talk with them about why you're feeling sad or scared and what you will do to feel better.
- Breathing and mindfulness activities can help children and adults relax if they start to feel worried or scared.
- Point out positive moments in the story (e.g. Nurse Tom being kind, Clown Doctors, playing games) and ask the child about their own happy or funny moments.
- Do a fun or comforting activity together afterwards.
- If reading the story is hard for you, ask another caring adult in the child's life to help with reading the story.
- As you read the story with the child over and over again, it is likely that any distress about the story will decrease.

If time goes by and the child is still sad, worried or not their usual self, reach out to their treating team or speak with your GP.



For more information on conversational reading and how to read with children of different ages, please scan the QR code or visit childrens.health.qld.gov.au/frankiesclubhouse

