CHAPTER TWO

EMOTIONAL STORMS

HOW TO LEARN TO RECOGNISE YOUR FEELINGS AND DEAL WITH ANGER

'I'm not afraid of storms for I'm learning how to sail my ship.'

Amy, *Little Women*

Everyone who goes through a big life experience feels stronger-than-usual emotions. That's why people cry at weddings and cheer and shout when their team wins the League Championship. At least those situations are familiar, so we know what feelings to expect, but faced with a major upset like a parental separation, our brains can go into a bit of a flap and start flinging about all sorts of weird feelings. Here are some things you might feel:

Although this sounds like a list of Snow White's latest helpers, it's no fun if all these emotions are swirling around in your head. You might find you feel several of these things in a short space of time: angry one minute, giggly the next, then desperately sad and in need of a cuddle. These waves of feelings are perfectly natural. Just as you would eat a burger in lots of bites rather than one huge gulp, your brain can only process the situation in small chunks. This means there are lots of emotional ups and downs as each bit is worked through, and that can make it seem like you're being tossed around on a stormy sea.

DEALING WITH THE FEELING

Mixed up and confused

Look at the list of feelings on page 25. Write down which of these feelings you have experienced over the last week. Isn't it amazing how many feelings we have every day?

You can become your own feelings detective. Try to name your feelings as accurately as you can. So instead of thinking, 'I feel a bit meh,' it might be more true to think, 'I'm feeling sad and angry.'

The more you get to know and name your feelings, the more you feel just that little bit more in control of them.

Think about how long each feeling lasted. Most feelings don't last for long at any one time. Even if you are feeling really low, remember that this feeling will pass.

Remember: **Feelings are like waves – they come and go. Some waves are big and noisy, others are smaller and more tickly. All day long we have waves of feelings, but they come and then they go.**

Feelings are not just in our heads – how we are feeling can affect our entire bodies. For example, if you're really worrying about something, it might give you a pain in your tummy or make your head ache. If you're scared, your heart will beat faster and you might feel shaky. When we're sad we often feel heavy, like we have a wet towel on our shoulders.

Working out where and how we experience a feeling in our bodies can help us identify our feelings better, which then means we can manage them more easily.

Grab a Pen!

How are you feeling at the moment?

Draw an outline of yourself and label where in your body you feel different emotions. Think especially about your head, neck, chest and tummy. Shaky, sweaty hands and wobbly, weak knees are often good clues too. Don't worry about it being right or wrong, or different from other people's feelings – this is all about you.

Once we are able to recognise our feelings better, we can begin to learn how to deal with them. This also means they're less likely to explode out when we least expect them. Different feelings require different responses. Some feelings are easier to manage than others. If we're feeling irritable, maybe a few deep breaths and a bit of space will make us feel better, but some feelings are BIG. So big they can take you by surprise, knock you off balance and even make you scared.

TRY THIS

What emotion are you feeling now?
How strong is that emotion?

Rate it out of 10 on our special Emotion-o-meter.

(You can copy the Emotion-o-meter into your journal.)

Try this exercise on different days and at different times – you will see that your emotions are not just on or off, sometimes they feel strong and sometimes not so much. The same situation can even give us different feelings at different times. (Although everyone feels sad when E.T. goes home.) Maybe you will see patterns in your feelings – such as feeling sad after leaving Mum's or feeling worried on a Thursday because it's PE at school.

Understanding these changes helps us to deal with the waves of emotions we have.

If you are feeling strong emotions, you will find ideas throughout the book to help you manage them.

Remember: We can't control the people around us, or all the things which happen to us, but we can learn to control our own thinking and feeling. This takes a whole lifetime to perfect, but you can start now by getting to know your feelings, understand why you're having them, and learning tools to help you manage these feelings.

One emotion that can feel difficult to manage is anger.

It Happened to Me

Kwame's Story

Kwame hated that he felt so angry inside all the time.

I couldn't really understand why but I just felt furious with everyone – my parents, my little sister, my friends, my teacher. It was like I had a volcano inside me just waiting to explode. I was always the happy one who made everyone laugh but now I was kind of scared at how I felt. One day I lost it in school and shouted at my teacher, knocked my chair over and ran out of class. I thought I was going to be in massive trouble, but my teacher was really good. When I calmed down, we had a long talk about how I was feeling. He helped me to talk to my parents, and now lets me have time out of class if everything is getting too much. At home I've started to do a lot of drawing and sketching, I really like it and it calms me down when my head is racing. If I notice my body is starting to get tense, I go on the trampoline. I know what to do with the anger a bit more. Now that everyone is talking about stuff I feel a lot happier.

There's nothing wrong with feeling angry. It's a natural reaction to unfairness or things being out of our control. A little bit of anger empowers us to stop something bad happening. For example, if you're in the park with your little brother and a bigger kid pushes him over, you feel angry because he can't defend himself, so you step in to protect him. Anger is your brain's way of saying, 'Hang on a minute. That's not right!'

When we get angry, we don't think things through as clearly as we normally would. That's why, if you feel angry, you suddenly get the courage to stand up to someone mean, when you've always been scared of them before. But because anger stops us from thinking clearly, we have to be careful how we manage it, so it doesn't cause problems. If we let angry feelings get out of hand, they can take over and control our behaviour like an alien in a scary movie! For example, it's normal to feel angry if your sister breaks the Lego model you've been working on all week. However, it's not acceptable to hit or hurt her or to break something of hers in revenge. This just makes the situation worse and will probably end up with you feeling guilty and sad too.

Instead, you can use words to let her know how you are feeling: 'I feel really angry because I spent so much time on that model, and now it's all ruined.'

Your sister can then at least understand your feelings and might even help make it better (even if she can't rebuild it, she might at least help you pick up the pieces).

Remember: **Feeling angry is OK. It's what we do with that anger which can be a problem.**

At times of change we are more likely to feel anger, because things are happening out of our control. If you find yourself feeling angry a lot, these are things you can try to stop the angry alien from taking over.

DEALING WITH THE FEELING

Anger

- REMOVE YOURSELF FROM THE SITUATION. Strong anger is a very short-lived emotion. If you can take yourself away from the person or situation you are angry with for just a few moments, you will probably find your anger fades. Walk into another room or outside.

- CONCENTRATE ON YOUR BREATHING. When we get angry, our breathing becomes very quick and shallow. We need to reverse this by breathing in nice, big, slow breaths. This sends a signal to our brain that it doesn't need to fire off angry alarms. Try some 'square breathing'.

  First, draw a large square on a piece of paper. Put your finger on the top-left corner of the square, then slowly move it across to the other corner while you breathe in. Pause

when you get to the corner. Now follow the line down, slowly breathing out. You can do this going around the square a few times until you feel calmer. If you practise a few times you won't need the square – you can just imagine it.

- TAKE IT OUT ON SOMETHING ELSE. Kicking a football, bouncing on a trampoline or punching a cushion can help to use up the angry energy. Make sure it's something that can't be hurt or get broken, though.

- FIND A SAFE PLACE TO SHOUT LOUDLY. Shouting, stomping your feet, running or singing into the air can also get rid of the built-up energy. Just don't do it in the supermarket.

- WRITE ALL OF YOUR FEELINGS DOWN IN AN ANGRY LETTER – then tear it into tiny pieces and throw them away.

- DRAW A PICTURE OF YOUR ANGER AS A PERSON. Then add on a silly moustache, big bushy eyebrows, a spotty hat or whatever you want to make it less frightening.

- PRACTISE THE WORDS YOU WANT TO SAY. Strangely, anger has a way of taking away our words. Instead of being able to explain what's wrong we can find ourselves huffing and spluttering and shouting. Think about what has made you feel angry and practise how you will explain that feeling if it happens again. For example: 'I feel angry when you don't tell me what's going on,' or 'I feel angry now, and my body

feels like a volcano about to erupt,' or 'I need to go and stand outside until I feel calmer.' If you have a few well-rehearsed lines up your sleeve, it will be easier to express how you feel in the heat of the moment and people are more likely to understand and help.

✳ GIVE IT TIME. Once we've been angry in the day, it can take our body a few hours to calm all the way back down. If something else annoys you again before your body has calmed all the way down, it can lead to another surge of anger. This can make it 'one of those days' where you leap from one angry moment to another. On days like that, it is so important to look after yourself and calm your poor, overworked brain down.

Remember: **If you feel your anger, sadness or other emotions are getting too big/strong for you to cope with, talk to someone. No one should ever feel they have to manage alone. Speak to your parents, or someone else you trust, and ask them to help you. It takes teamwork to get through a time like this.**

Being the child of a family going through a divorce or separation means you grow up fast. No matter how much your parents try to protect you from what's happening you will hear and see things that a lot of other kids don't.

They may be arguing a lot, shouting, or just not speaking to each other. You might see them upset or crying. They may be short-tempered with you, or sometimes seem as if they've forgotten you exist altogether. This may make you feel angry with your parents, but try to remember they are going through a tough time too. They really did intend to stay together forever and now they are having to find a new way forward. They will be emotional and stressed, and this can cause people to act in unexpected ways.

Understanding this can help you see that they are just not being themselves at the moment, and although that might be annoying or make you anxious, if everyone in the family supports each other, it will pass, and things will settle down.

Thinking Differently

Training your brain

When we're angry with someone it's hard to see the nice or good things about them. Instead our brains tend to just focus on the things they do or say that carry on making us angry. But there are lots of positive things about that person as well. Train your brain to focus on these by reminding yourself of some of the good things. Complete these sentences:

- One thing I like about ..... is .....
- One happy memory I have with them is when .....
- I am grateful to them for.....
- In the future I hope that..... and I will be able to.....

Remember: If you are scared about someone becoming so angry they use violence (hitting, punching or otherwise hurting) against either you or someone else, then you need to talk to someone about it. Speak to an adult you trust, or contact an organisation such as Childline who can help and advise you. Contact details are at the back of the book.

Survival Kit Essentials

1. NAME THE FEELING. Try to find the right words for what you feel.

2. LOCATE THE FEELING. Recognise where you feel it in your body.

3. TRACK YOUR FEELINGS. In a journal or on a chart. Use pictures or words, whatever works best for you. You will then start to find patterns in how you feel.

4. MANAGE YOUR ANGER. This can feel like a big, scary emotion, but it can be understood and managed, just like every other emotion.

5. LOOK FOR THE POSITIVES. Don't let anger cloud your judgement of others.

SAY IT OUT LOUD!

'It's completely natural to have these strong feelings, so I don't need to be frightened of them. I know they will come and go, but by learning about them I will understand myself even more.'