

Development of a Parent-Led Resource using Storybooks to Support Knowledge and Skills in Managing Anxiety

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INTRODUCTION

According to Children’s Mental Health Ontario, approximately 200,000 children facing mental health challenges, such as anxiety, have had no contact with mental health services at all— primarily due to extended service wait times and systemic barriers to access (CMHO, 2020). Adopting a stepped-care model (see Figure 2), where treatments of differential intensity are targeted towards different populations, may improve access to supports (Kendall et al., 2016). Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), a skills based therapy for alleviating maladaptive thoughts and behaviours (see Figure 3), can be effective in reducing anxiety when administered in non-clinical, family-focused settings (Cobham, 2012). In consideration of this, we are developing a resource to promote parent engagement in service delivery and an evidence-based understanding of anxiety and CBT strategies for parents and children that can be utilized as a step 1 and 2 treatment.

METHODS

A sample of storybooks (n = 189) for children aged 0-12 from the NovelList K-8 Plus database were categorized into nine anxiety domains (generalized, separation, nighttime, social, performance, panic attacks, specific phobias, anxiety due to new situations/ uncertainty, and anxiety due to significant events). The texts were further screened for in-person or virtual accessibility, specifically, if copies were available in the London Public Library system or if the books had digital transcripts like YouTube read-alongs. Two raters coded eligible books for evidence of CBT skills (see Figure 1) using Friedberg, McClure, & Garcia’s (2009) CBT modules (psychoeducation, self-monitoring, behavioural techniques, cognitive restructuring, behavioural exposure) with the addition of Dalzell’s (2016) cultural elements module. Lastly, storybooks with the most comprehensive scores across modules were selected and guiding questions created in preparation for their inclusion in an anxiety literacy resource for caregivers and children.

RESULTS

A sufficient amount of storybooks (5-50) were identified for all targeted anxiety domains except panic attacks. Consistent with a pilot study by Riggin and King (2021), scores for the psychoeducation module were highly correlated with the self-monitoring module. For each domain excluding panic attacks, at least three books were above the inclusion threshold (1.83) and the three highest were incorporated into the guided resource while ensuring that all CBT modules were sufficiently represented.

IMPLICATIONS

The classification of storybooks into discrete anxiety domains facilitates treatment individualization, as the resource can be tailored for a specific disorder or concern. There is evidence that individualized CBT supports reduce anxiety symptomatology and life-interference more than manualized supports (Lundkvist-Houndoumadi, 2016). Books high in certain CBT modules and moderate in others can be complemented by those high in lacking modules to ensure the resource thoroughly demonstrates each CBT element.

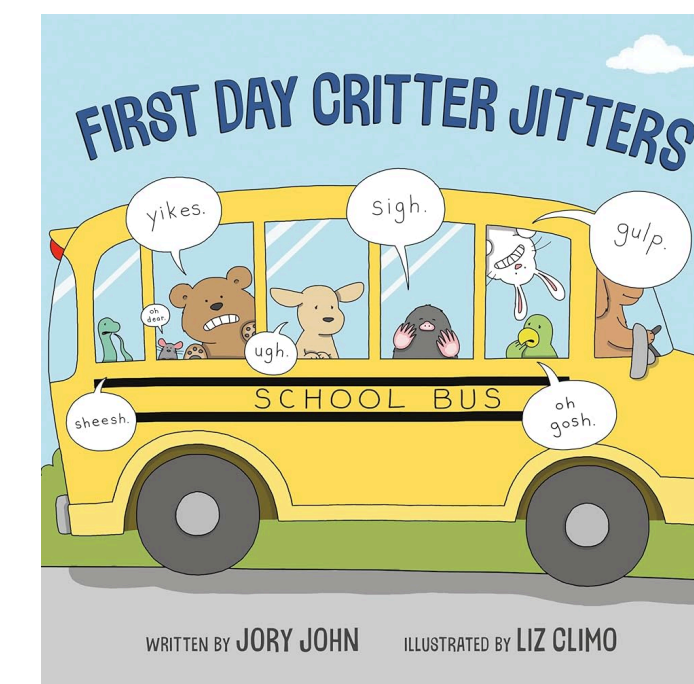
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Our next step involves finalizing the resource in preparation for a feasibility study investigating process and outcome evaluations of our intervention, with a focus on social validity. We plan to ascertain parent feedback to determine the tool’s acceptability, as well as if outcome measures like children’s anxiety and stress levels improve with use.



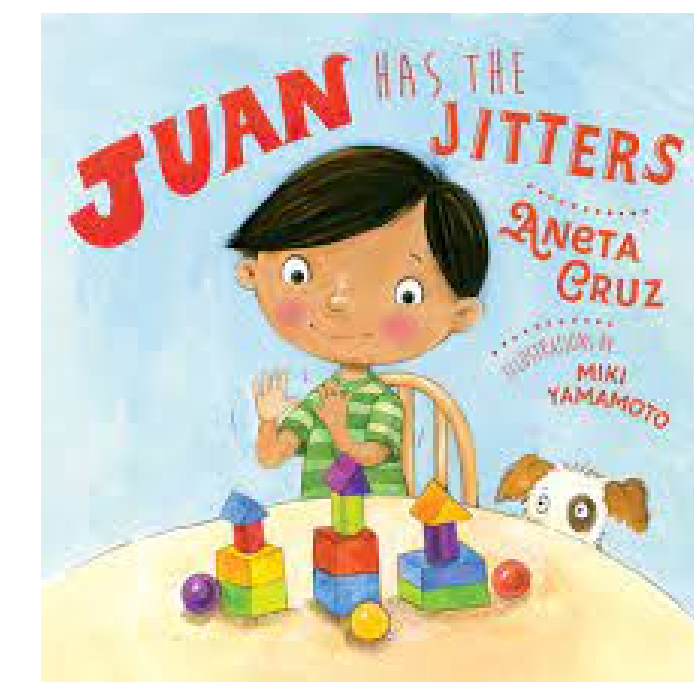
Storybooks depicting CBT techniques, paired with guided dialogue for parents, may be an accessible therapeutic and preventative intervention for anxiety disorders in children.

SEPARATION ANXIETY



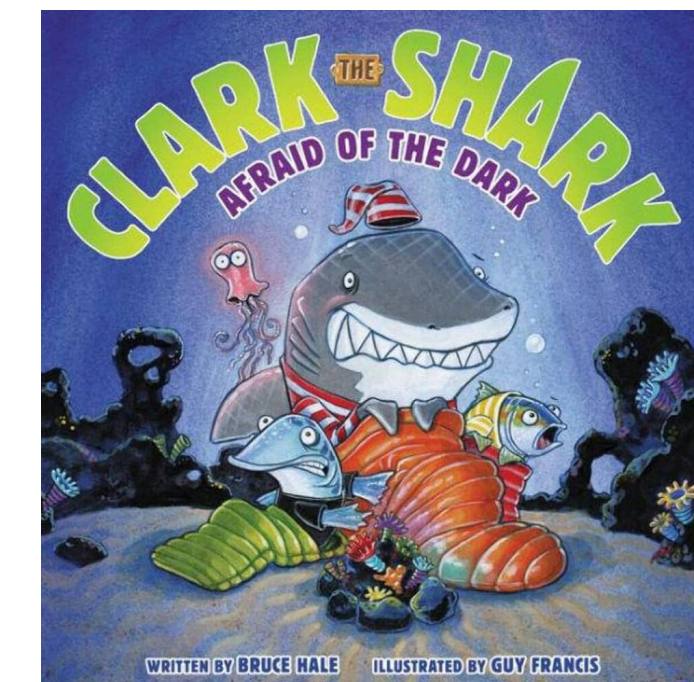
- The animals were worried about going to school for the first time because they did not know what to expect. Are there any situations you are unsure about?
- Mouse is worried because all the other kids are bigger than him, Kangaroo is worried about being away from his mom’s pouch, Parrot talks a lot when he’s nervous, and Rabbit has a hard time sitting still in class. Do you relate to any of these critters’ feelings?
- Armadillo was anxious about forgetting things. Do you ever forget things when you’re worried, or do you know someone forgetful? What sort of strategies can help you to remember?

GENERALIZED ANXIETY



- Have you ever felt the Jitters (swooshing and swirling tummy, buzzing ears)? If so, what was going on while you were feeling this way?
- Juan calms himself by sorting his books by size, his blocks by colour, naming all the shapes he can see in his room, and clapping. What sort of things do you do to calm down?
- Juan’s teacher and classmates show their support by trusting Juan with a special role (Mathletics Game judge) and clapping with him. In what ways do you like to be supported?

NIGHTTIME ANXIETY



- Have you ever felt afraid of sleeping or seeing spooky things in the dark? What were you thinking or feeling in your body?
- Clark repeats the words “take heart, be smart, sharks aren’t afraid of the dark” when he worries about sleeping in the dark. Could you think of a song or special phrase to make yourself feel better when you are worried or scared?
- Clark is afraid of his friends making fun of him for his fear of the dark, but they end up having the same fear as Clark! Clark and his friends make a song to feel braver, and Clark feels better after! Why do you think it is important to share our fears and feelings with others?

Figure 1 Sample CBT Module and Subcategories for Storybook Coding

Subcategory (0-1):	Rating:
Utilizes concrete metaphor of problems	1
Defines problem	1
Normalizes Problem	1
Describes symptoms of problem	1
Reference to coping skills and/or treatment	1
Overall Rating (0-3):	3

Figure 2 Applications of Parent Resource to the Stepped Care Model of Anxiety

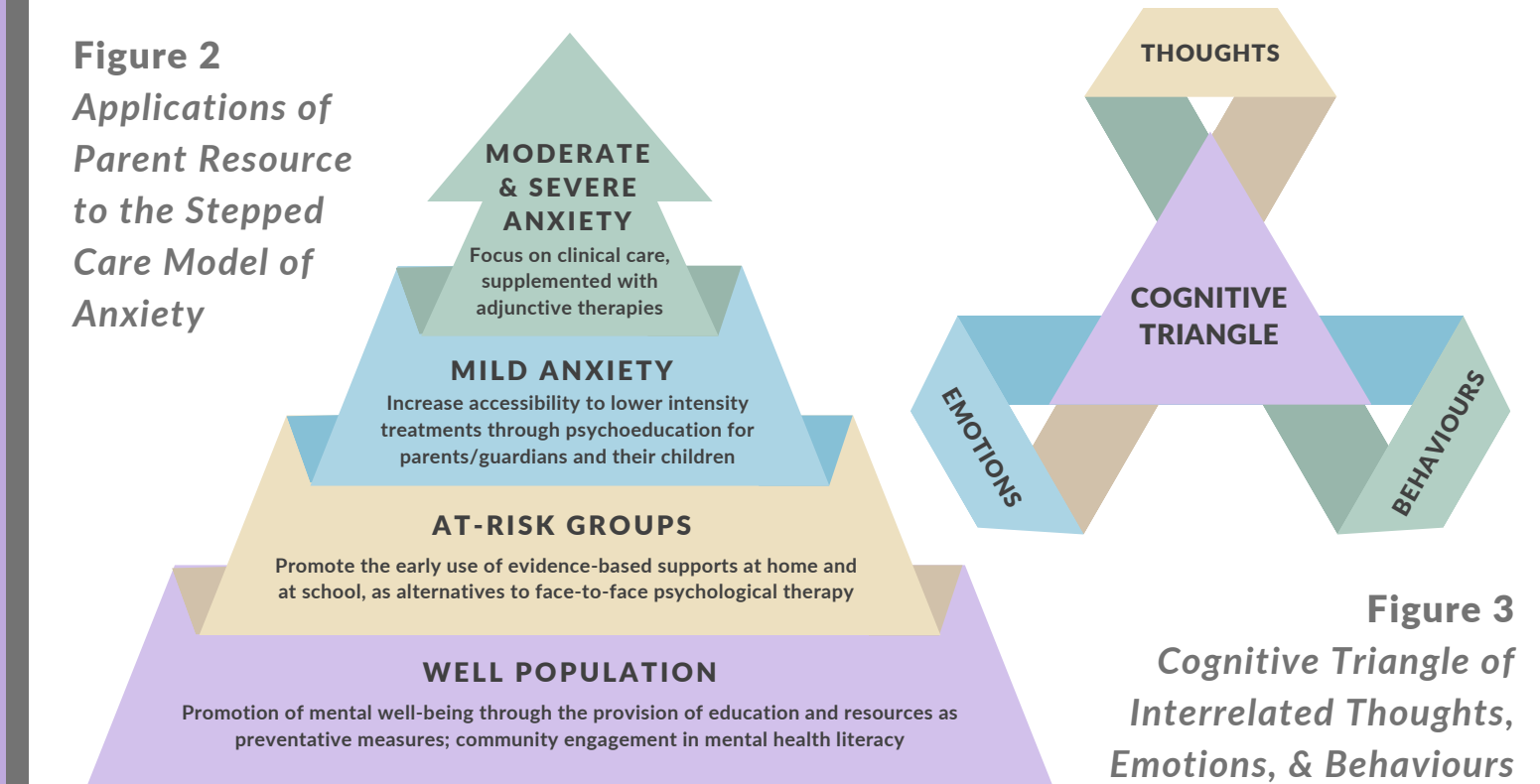
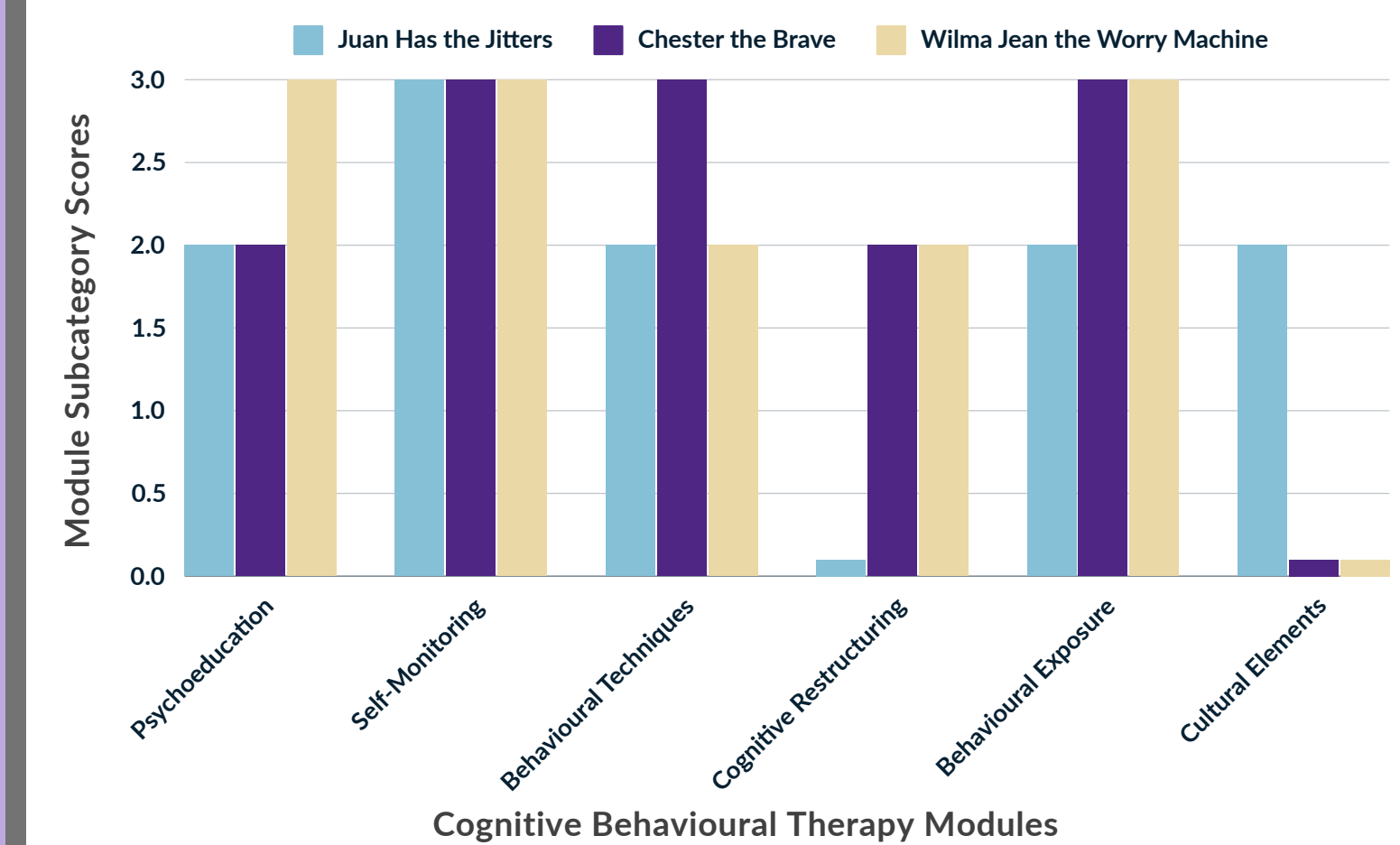


Figure 4 Coded CBT Scores for Books Depicting Generalized Anxiety Disorder



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