

Not Today, Celeste!



The story of a dog,
and her human who
got depression

by Liza Stevens

Guidance for adults using 'Not Today, Celeste' and the Activity Book when working with children

'Not Today, Celeste' is a story about a dog's experience of her owner's depressive illness.

The story aims to support children who know someone who is, or has been, depressed.

It could also be used to explore other types of mental illness or emotional trauma.

Children often find it very challenging to talk directly about themselves and/or difficult experiences; Celeste provides an opportunity for them to use a 'distancing' technique to tackle something they may otherwise struggle with. It is likely to be much easier for them to talk about Celeste than to talk about their own feelings and experiences.

The story and the related activities will draw on their own experience: so, even when they might not appear to have made the link, it will almost certainly be happening – it isn't necessary (and may be counter-productive) to make those connections for them. It is absolutely fine for them to stick only to talking about Celeste – **if a child struggles with any of the activities where they are encouraged to think about themselves, then suggest that they do it for Celeste instead.**

Some suggestions to accompany each activity in the activity booklet:

- The front page of the booklet shows Rupert and Celeste riding on a bike – they are moving forward. It would be good to **return to this image at the end of the activity booklet** and talk about where Rupert and Celeste might go to ... what adventures they might have in store... how are they feeling now?
- Rupert in grey – allows the child(ren) to name and explore difficult feelings. All of the 'feelings' words could equally apply to all of the pictures of Rupert; even when he appears 'angry' he is almost certainly feeling scared and anxious on the inside. They may decide to draw arrows from all of the feelings to all of the pictures and that would be fine – there are no right answers. Gives the opportunity to talk about times when people might not always show what they are feeling.
- Rupert getting help – thinking about what Rupert and Celeste may be saying helps to put words to their feelings and worries. If it is too difficult for the child(ren) to write down their own worries, then they could think about what Celeste is worried about and write those worries down here (if a class has a 'worry box' then they could post their worries in the box).
- Rupert and Celeste in colour - when Rupert is depressed he is 'empty' of colour... here we can think about how colours might relate to how people feel – encourage the child(ren) to think about whether their own feelings might have particular 'colours', or if colours give them different feelings, for example, "purple helps me to feel calm".
- Celeste's special place – ask the child(ren) to look at the warm cosy basket, with its blanket, soft toy to cuddle, ball to play with and bone to chew... the things that help Celeste to feel happy and safe. Offer them the chance to think of their own special place – or the chance to create an imaginary one – and draw it.
- Celeste's photo wall – encourage the child(ren) to think of safe, trusted adults who they know, and who they might be able to talk to about a worry (parents, grandparents, carers, teachers, lunchtime assistants, aunts, uncles, older siblings, neighbours etc.) and draw some faces in the empty frames.
- Celeste playing with her friends – ask the child(ren) to think about all the things that they can do that can help them to feel good (playing, walking, baking, building, skating, etc.) and then draw some of those activities.
- Send a message to – this provides an opportunity for the child(ren) to think about what it might feel like to be around someone who is living with mental health difficulties.
- Celeste dreaming – an opportunity to recap the things that Celeste learnt during the story - ask the child(ren) to read back through the book and find the part in the story when Celeste discovered these things

This Guide was written and produced by **Teresa Day** for the **Charlie Waller Memorial Trust's Book Club**

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This guide is for use alongside the Activity Booklet



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