

The Best Kids' Books on Mental Health of 2024

childmind.org/article/the-best-kids-books-on-mental-health-of-2024

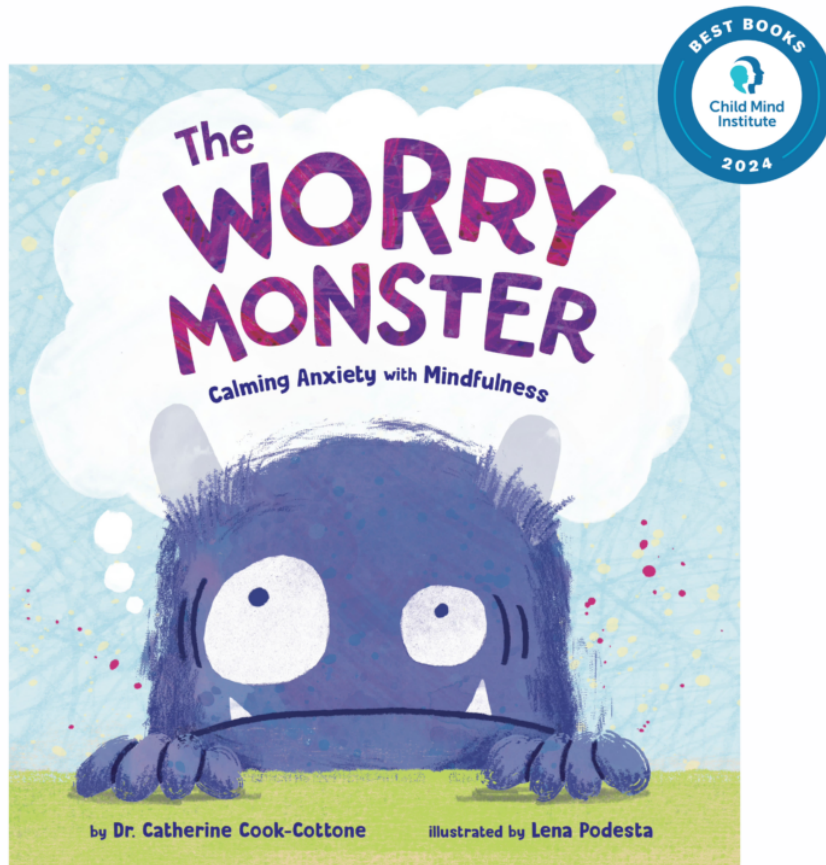
Writer: [Karen Cicero](#)

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Each year, it seems that there's a new children's book (or 10!) that addresses every emotional or learning challenge. But how appropriate and helpful is the message? Clinicians at the Child Mind Institute — specializing in conditions that include anxiety, depression, and autism — reviewed more than 60 titles that were published in 2024 to compile our inaugural annual list of the best kids' books for mental health. In addition to an engaging storyline, our experts prioritized mental health books that help kids understand and handle their challenges. These 20 selections — some featuring grumpy cats, cute-as-can-be monsters, and authors with real-life experience with these struggles — rose to the top of the stack. Read them with your kids and share them with their classroom libraries, because these stories can broaden every child's perspective and foster kindness and empathy.

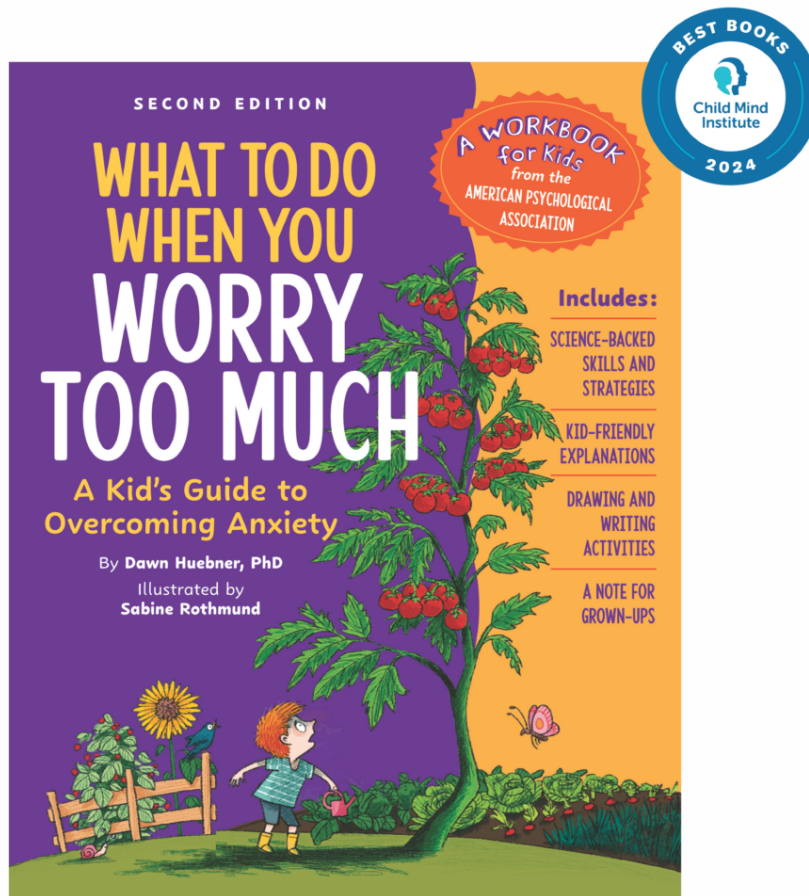
Anxiety



The Worry Monster

Written by Dr. Catherine Cook-Cottone, illustrated by Lena Podesta

The author (a child psychologist) seamlessly — and hilariously — weaves anxiety-related coping strategies into this story about an endearing googly-eyed monster who frets about going on a school field trip. After the monster expresses his fears to readers (“What if I miss the bus?” “What if I get lost? What if I need my pet dragon?”), he remembers the “Seven Mindful Moves” that his teacher showed him to help him calm down. As the monster tries each one, the book increases its kid appeal with whimsical illustrations and fun text that directly addresses the reader right up to a “dino-mite” conclusion at the museum. “*The Worry Monster* offers practical mindful-based coping skills for young kids with anxiety,” says an expert from the Child Mind Institute. “It’s relatable and easy to follow.” Ages 4-8. Published by [Random House Books for Young Readers](#).



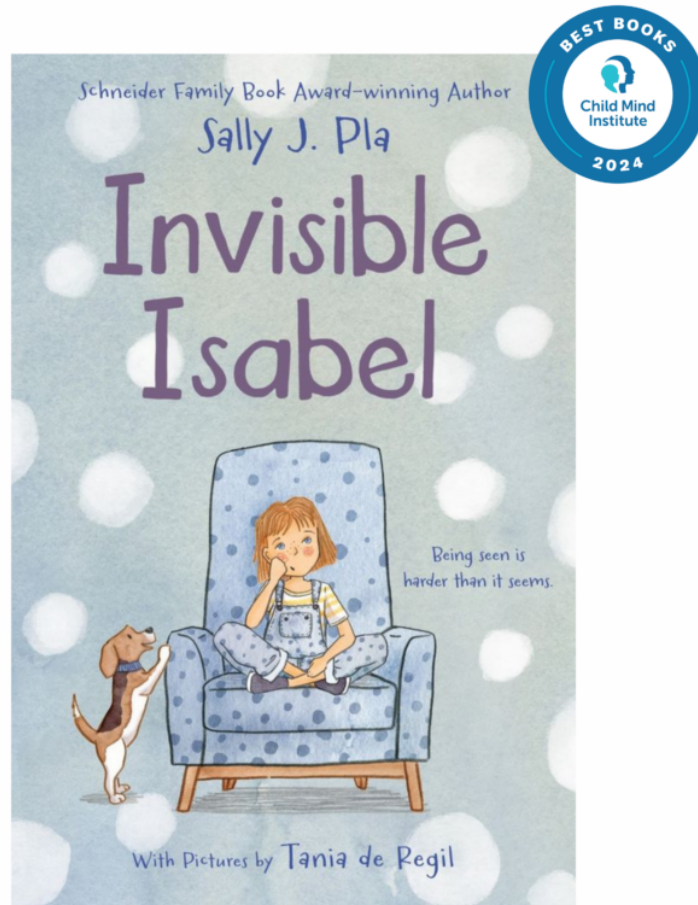
What to Do When You Worry Too Much

Written by Dawn Huebner, PhD, illustrated by Sabine Rothmund

This revised and expanded edition of a best-selling workbook from the American Psychological Association guides kids and parents through

behavioral strategies that can be used to alleviate anxiety. Through simple explanations and metaphors, the workbook dispenses relatable advice and gives kids many drawing and writing prompts. For instance, one

prompt asks children to draw or write about a time “your brain alarm went off and it turned out to be a false alarm.” Ages 6-10. Published by [Magination Press](#).



Invisible Isabel

Written by Sally J. Pla, illustrated by Tania de Regil

Middle-school readers of this novel in verse will relate to Isabel, who is told, “You worry for no reason!” and “Don’t be so sensitive!” But Isabel has lots of reasons — “extremely important testing” coming up, school bullies, and five siblings who make her feel lost in the shuffle at home. “I like how *Invisible Isabel* uses the term ‘worry-moths’ to give anxiety a specific name that represents its physical symptoms,” says a Child Mind Institute expert. “Middle school can be a tricky age, and many kids feel that they aren’t special enough. They can use this book to start a conversation about seeing a professional.” Ages 8-12. Published by [Quill Tree Books](#).

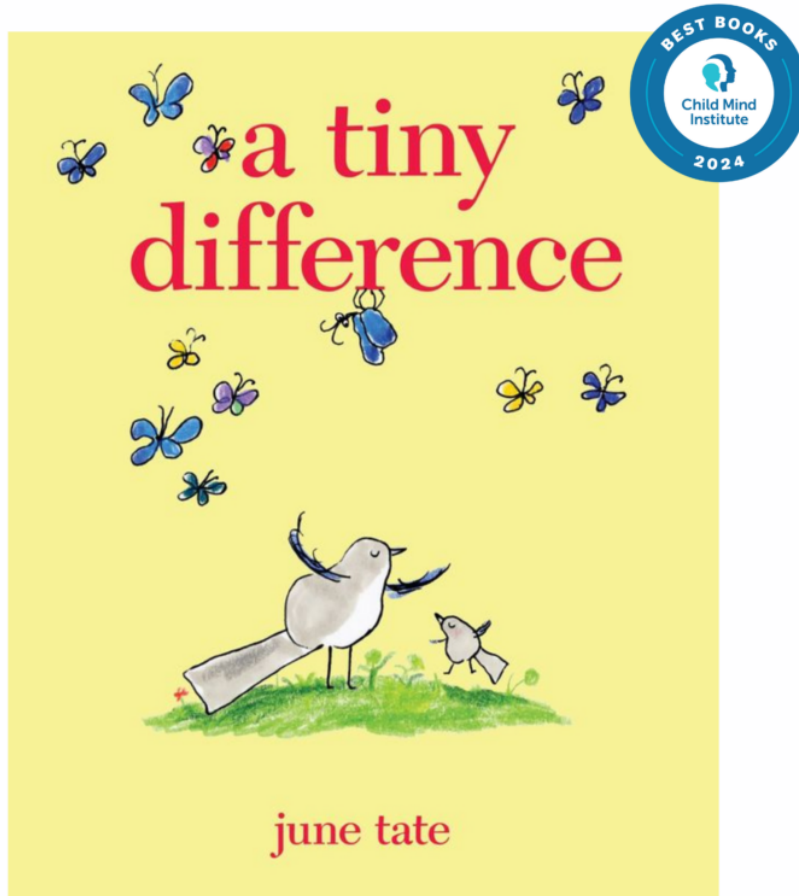


Unstuck

By Barbara Dee

Friendship problems lead to a big case of writer’s block for a seventh grader who used to love creative writing. Day after day, she either writes nothing in class or crosses out all her words. Anxiety about losing her best friend, who now attends a different school, is part of the problem. “*Unstuck* highlights the challenges that come along with overcoming something difficult in order to pursue your passion,” says a Child Mind Institute expert. Ages 8-14. Published by [Aladdin](#).

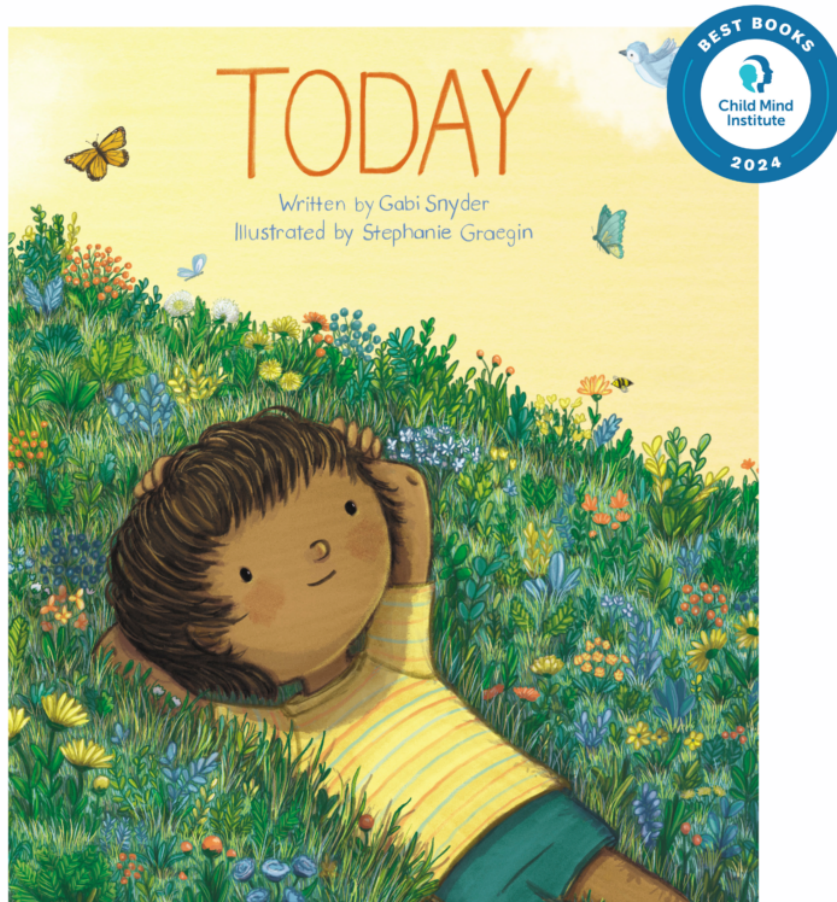
Mindfulness



A Tiny Difference

Written and illustrated by June Tate

This lyrical story, featuring a mother bird and her baby who feels “a little bit off,” grips young readers on the first page and never lets go. Mom assures her baby that it’s okay not to feel “perfectly perfect” all the time, but she wants to try some things to “see if it makes a tiny difference.” The playful, child-like artwork pairs well with the encouraging, poetic text about breathing techniques and other mindfulness strategies. “I like that the book is accepting of things as they are and also focuses on small things to do to shift emotions and make ‘a tiny difference,’” says a Child Mind Institute expert. Ages 3-7. Published by [Katherine Tegen Books](#).



Today

By Gabi Snyder, illustrated by Stephanie Graegin

An interesting approach to a story about mindfulness starts when a child realizes that some days go by way too slow. (“Today stretches long when you’re counting the weeks to summer/Today takes forever when your parents yak-yak-yak with the neighbors.”) Then other days pass by in a flash and “you want to freeze the moment and stay here forever.” For those days, practicing mindfulness helps you hold on to the memories. “The story clearly depicts the ways our minds are pulled to the future or the past,” says a Child Mind Institute expert. “The ending includes an example of how to practice being mindful.” Ages 4-8. Published by [Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers](#).

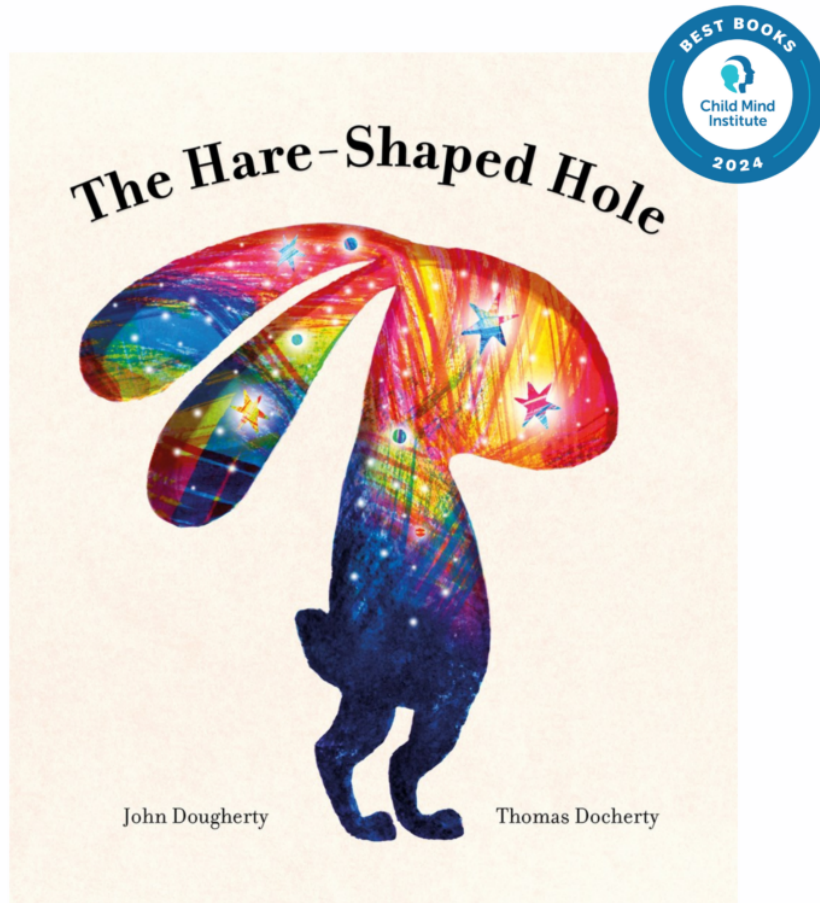
Feelings



Bea's Bad Day

Written and illustrated by Tom Percival

Kids have a new role model for bouncing back after disappointment: Bea, the title character, is “shattered” when a blizzard closes the roads and spoils her birthday plans. The illustrations depict how she feels broken in pieces, even when her mom gives her a present. But then her older brother suggests sledding and “a few of the cracks fade away.” More and more cracks disappear as the siblings whoosh down the hill, demonstrating that “Bea’s day had started out badly — but that doesn’t mean it couldn’t end well.” A twist ending involving a birthday cake further builds Bea’s resilience. “*Bea’s Bad Day* conveys a nice message about disappointment and situations not meeting expectations,” says a Child Mind Institute expert. “It’s a realistic and fun read.” Ages 3-7. Published by [Bloomsbury Children’s Books](#).



The Hare-Shaped Hole

Written by John Dougherty, illustrated by Thomas Docherty

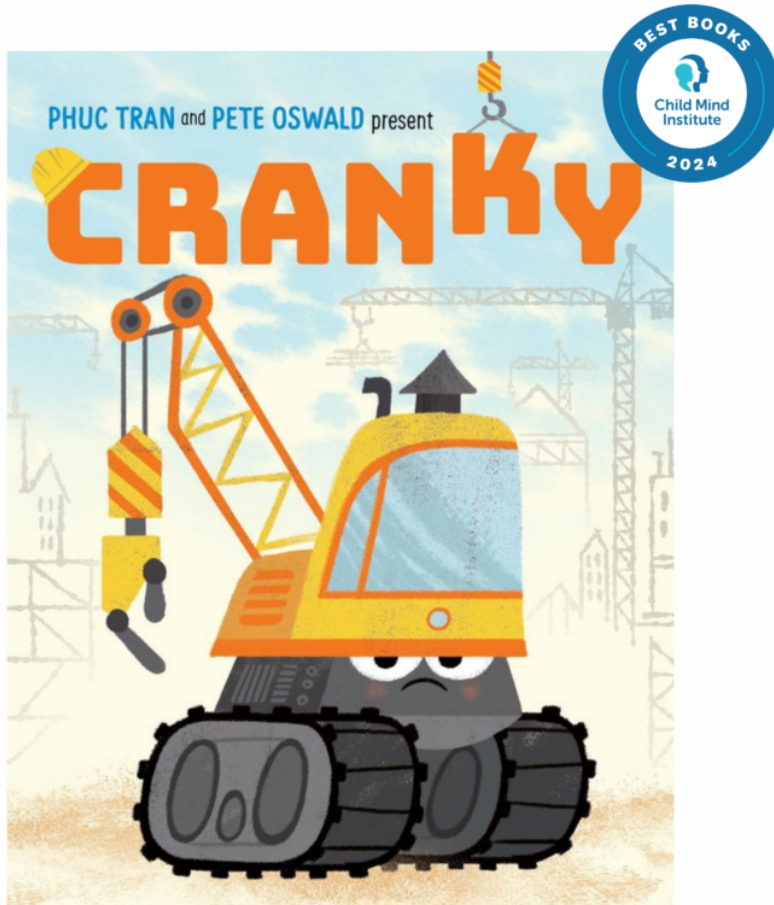
This is a tender story that helps kids through the grief process of losing a friend, whether the missing person has moved to a new town or died. The book begins with inseparable besties turtle and hare playing together. Then, out of the blue, hare disappears. (“She just wasn’t there. There was nothing to see. But a hole in the air where hare ought to be.”) Hare’s dark shadow is depicted on the pages as the turtle experiences the many faces of grief, from denial to anger and finally acceptance. “*The Hare-Shaped Hole* validates feelings of grief,” says a Child Mind Institute expert. “This story is helpful for children understanding a loss in their life.” Ages 3-7. Published by [Frances Lincoln Children’s Books](#).



My Thoughts Have Wings

Written by Maggie Smith, illustrated by Leanne Hatch

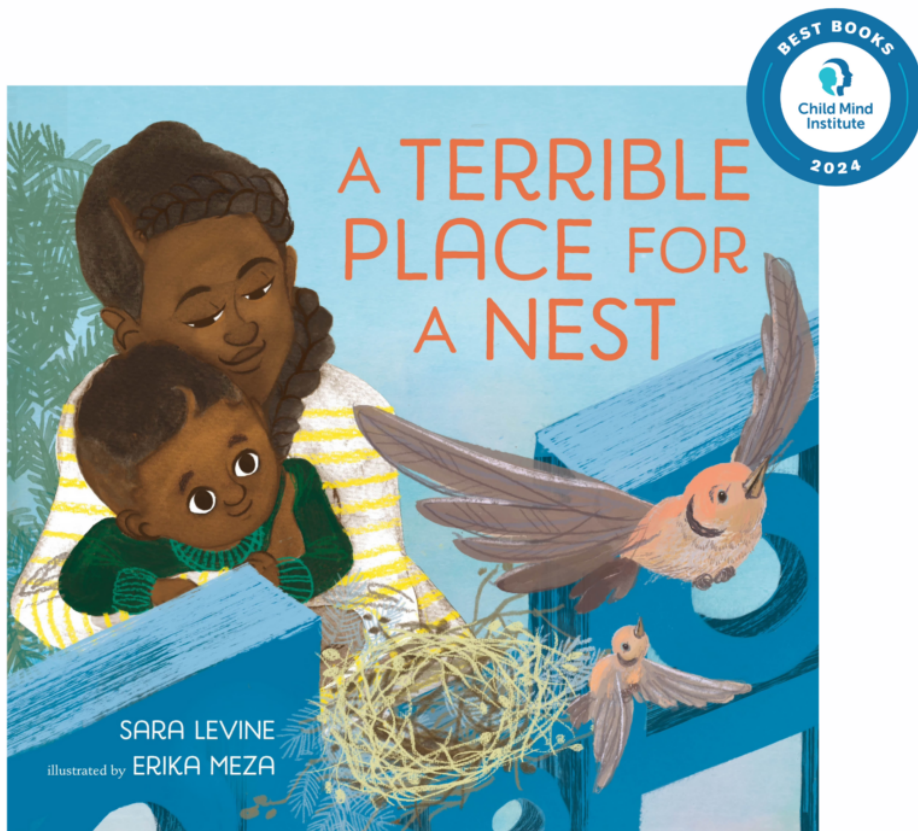
A reassuring bedtime story can help kids have sweet dreams. Lying in bed, a girl's mind is racing with intrusive thoughts of spiders, bad dreams, and bullies. Her astute mom compares thoughts to birds: "Some fly away quickly while others build nests in our heads." She later adds, "Everyone worries. We need to make sure there's room for happy thoughts." Then the girl's mind turns to ice cream cones, puppy cuddles, and flying kites as she pictures happy thoughts building a cozy nest in her head. The textured illustrations give the story warmth and depth. "*My Thoughts Have Wings* offers a sweet, memorable image of thoughts nesting in your mind like birds," says a Child Mind Institute expert. Ages 3-8. Published by [Balzer + Bray](#).



Cranky

Written by Phuc Tran, illustrated by Pete Oswald

Construction vehicles as characters help build kids' social-emotional skills in this engaging, multi-layered picture book. Even though it's a beautiful day, a crane feels cranky but doesn't want to talk about it. ("You know what doesn't help when you're feeling cranky? A lot of talking.") He dodges his friends and refuses to celebrate the completion of a bridge. But in the end his friends let him know that it's okay to be cranky. ("You know what doesn't make me cranky? Knowing my friends care about me ... even when I'm cranky.") It's child-friendly, accurate, and has sweet illustrations, says a Child Mind Institute expert. "It uses silly language and jokes to present a meaningful message." Ages 4-8. Published by [HarperCollins](https://www.harpercollins.com/).

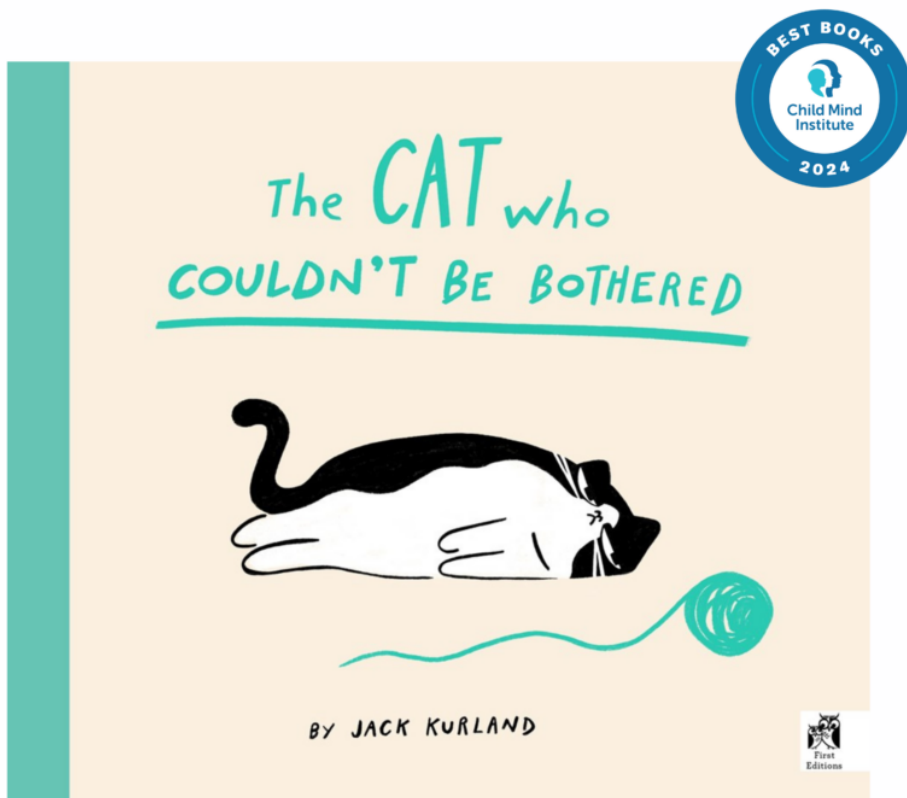


A Terrible Place for a Nest

Written by Sara Levine, illustrated by Erika Meza

It's hard to move to a new home — and the boy in this story is struggling. “I’m never going to fall asleep here,” he says. Still in his funk, he and his mom notice doves building a nest on top of a fence outside his window. “It’s a terrible place to build a nest!” he tells his mom. Sure enough, the movers accidentally knock down the nest. After the boy rebuilds it, the birds don’t come near it for a while. Then one day, a bird lays an egg in the nest, and the boy makes signs alerting passersby not to disturb it. The last pages featuring mom and son reading at bedtime brilliantly tie it all together: “I told them it wasn’t a great place for a nest. But we made it work.” Says a Child Mind Institute expert: “*A Terrible Place for a Nest* deals with the discomfort of moving to a new place in an unexpected and indirect way. But it’s not so subtle that kids won’t understand what it’s about. It’s sweet without being cheesy.” Ages 4-8. Published by [Roaring Brook Press](#).

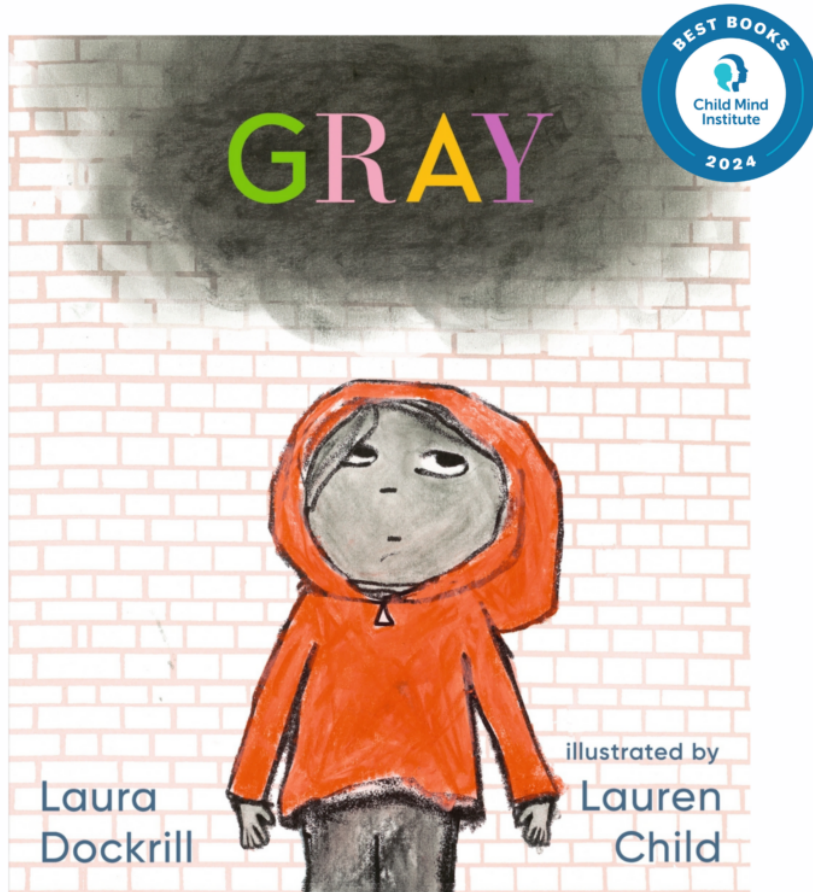
Sadness and Depression



The Cat Who Couldn't Be Bothered

Written and illustrated by Jack Kurland

In this funny book, a black-and-white cat rebuffs offers from feline friends to chase a ball of string, go to a party, even jet off into space, saying over and over he can't be bothered. Finally, he tells them all to STOP, and explains that he's just feeling sad and doesn't want to do anything. "*The Cat Who Couldn't Be Bothered* can help to normalize a range of emotions for a child," says a Child Mind Institute expert. "I love how the illustrations convey the cat's mood and the frantic effort that its friends are engaging in to try to cheer up the cat. The cat accepts its emotions without succumbing to the pressure to cheer up. Instead, the cat's friends are able to be with him." Ages 3-7. Published by [Frances Lincoln First Editions](#).



Gray

Written by Laura Dockrill, illustrated by Lauren Child

Comparing feelings to colors is nothing new, but this picture book does it exceptionally well. It begins with a boy who announces, “Today I am gray.” Throughout the story, which features some cleverly die-cut pages where images on other pages peek through, the boy explains what it means to be gray: “Gray is lonely. Gray is when you feel like you don’t belong.” The book doesn’t offer solutions for overcoming “grayness” but instead points out that happier feelings still exist inside in the child — and the mother in the book loves him even when he’s down. “*Gray* is a very comforting read about sadness,” says our Child Mind Institute expert. “Children will understand with a loving message of acceptance.” Ages 3-7. Published by [Candlewick Press](#).



A Voice in the Storm

Written by Dawn Huebner, illustrated by Bonnie Matthews

In this deeply moving picture book that's best suited for third graders and up, a sad rat feels she can't share her feelings with her best friend. Saying she "needs some air," she tries to escape her internal storm and ends up in a terrifying thunderstorm. When the rat runs into a bear, the bear helps her find shelter and find her voice ("Just make some noise. You try — be a voice in the storm."). She returns home to her best friend, finally able to express her feelings. The somber color palette matches the rat's feelings, with bright accents for hopeful moments. "*A Voice in the Storm* addresses emotion dysregulation and encourages getting support from others," says a Child Mind Institute expert. Ages 8+. Published by [Candlewick Studio](#).

OCD



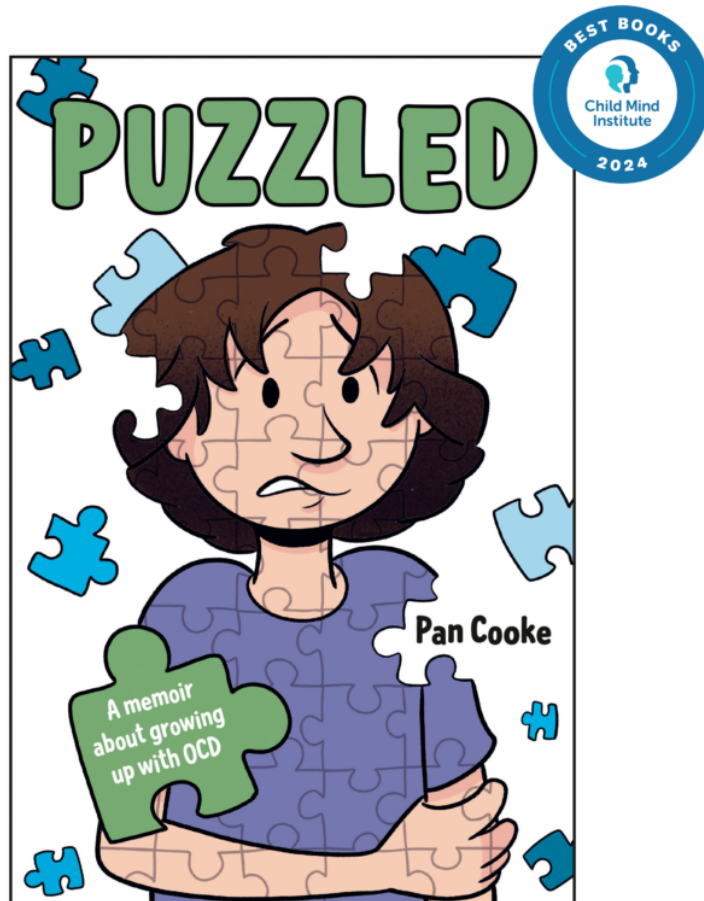
The Very Best Me

Written by Marin Canaday, illustrated by Agus Prajodo

The author, who has *OCD*,

compares the condition to a little monster that is part of her, sharing that “sometimes she even forgets it’s there.” But she goes on to explain that on other days, the monster grows huge, shouting at her and ordering her around, and then she needs help from her family. “*The Very Best Me* is good for describing what it can feel like to have *OCD*, intrusive thoughts, and anxiety,” says a Child Mind Institute expert. Ages 4-8.

Published by [Mascot Kids](#).



Puzzled

Written and illustrated by Pan Cooke

In this graphic novel/memoir, the author shares how he dealt with compulsive counting, repetitive prayers, and eventually disordered eating during childhood, desperately searching for the solution to the “puzzle” of what was wrong with him. Readers will be relieved to find out in the book’s back matter that the author, now in his thirties, has his OCD symptoms under control and, as he writes, “thankfully it’s a secret that I no longer have to carry.” Says a Child Mind Institute expert, “*Puzzled* does a nice job at explaining a variety of OCD symptoms, including scrupulosity, somatic obsessions, magical thinking, and the fear of making a mistake, using real life examples and visuals.” Ages 8-14. Published by [Rocky Pond Books](#).

ADHD



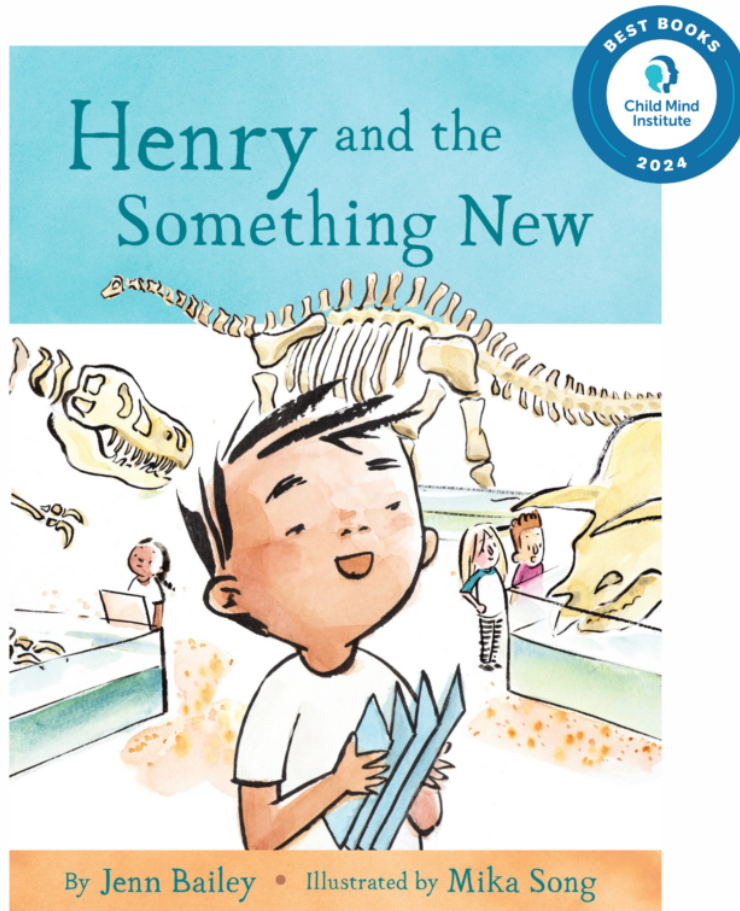
That Always Happens Sometimes

Written by Kiley Frank, illustrated by K-Fai Steele

A sympathetic portrayal of how *ADHD*

affects a child's school and home life starts when Max misses the bus because he gets distracted by squirrels. At school, he's lost electric pencil sharpener privileges after trying it out on a crayon, and there are tennis balls on the legs of his chair to cushion the noise he makes by moving so much. He daydreams about wearing all eight sweatshirts he's forgotten to take home at once. But then he thinks creatively to help his group build a super-tall tower out of index cards — a feat that earns high praise from the teacher. "*That Always Happens Sometimes* is for students who get distracted easily throughout their day," says a Child Mind Institute expert. "It normalizes and provides relatable experiences." Ages 4-8. Published by [Knopf](#).

Autism

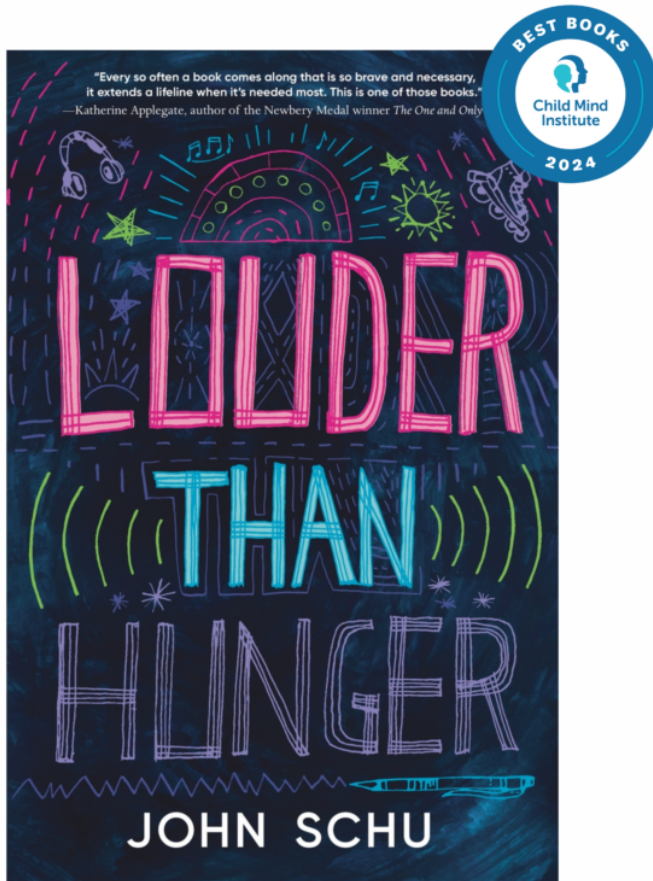


Henry and the Something New

Written by Jenn Bailey, illustrated by Mika Song

Characters with autism are few and far between in kids' literature, making this 56-page beginning chapter book series a welcome addition. In this second book in the series, Henry, a school-age boy with autism, goes on a school field trip to a natural history museum. Not only does he face a disruption in his routine but he also has to contend with the noisy school bus and wait endlessly to get to the dinosaurs, his favorite. How he powers through and is rewarded in the end, will be relatable to children with autism and a helpful window into their world for classmates. "Henry is endearing and also nuanced — not just a cookie cutter example of a child on the spectrum," says a Child Mind Institute expert. Ages 6-9. Published by [Chronicle Books](#).

Eating Disorders



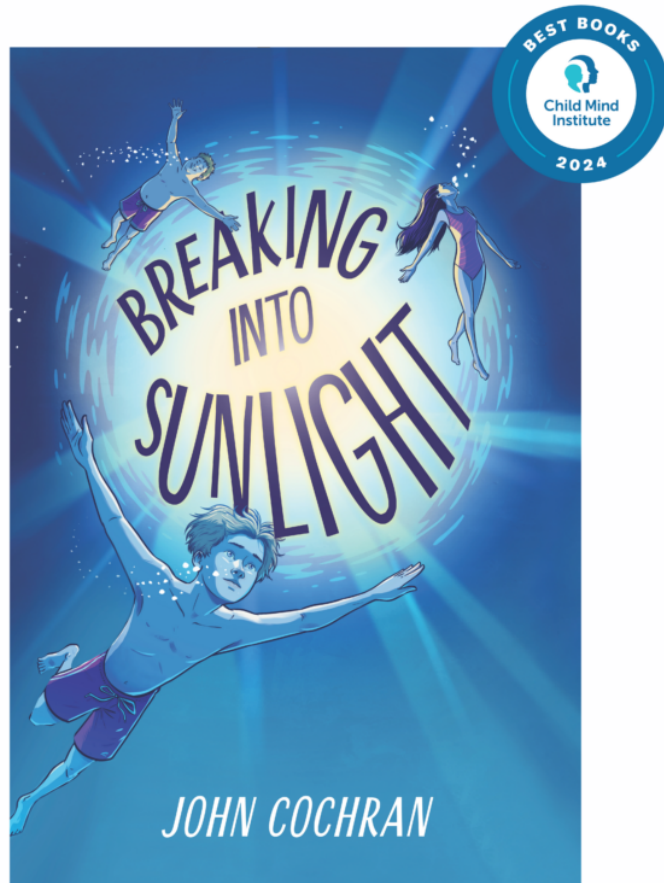
Louder Than Hunger

Written by John Schu

This novel in verse beautifully (and sometimes painfully) recounts a character named Jake's battle with and recovery from *anorexia nervosa*

and obsessive compulsive disorder, a story similar to the author's own struggles that began when he was in eighth grade. "Readers may be able to relate and connect to their own experiences," says a Child Mind Institute expert. "It's important to read with a therapist or support person, to support a therapeutic impact." Ages 14+. Published by [Candlewick Press](#).

A Parent's Addiction



Breaking Into Sunlight

Written by John Cochran

This heartfelt novel about a seventh-grade boy who hides his father’s pain medication addiction will resonate with the 1 in 8 kids living with a parent who has a substance use disorder. After his father overdoses again, the boy and his mom move, but he keeps his father’s secret from his friends and struggles with leaving his dad. “*Breaking Into Sunlight* is a beautiful story of a son’s journey and commitment to radically accepting his father’s substance use disorder,” says a Child Mind Institute expert. “It accurately portrays the misplaced responsibility and guilt adolescents often experience regarding parents’ addiction, relationships, and interpersonal conflict. It also honestly describes the shame teens might experience about their own feelings and how their family is different.” Ages 10+. Published by [Algonquin Young Readers](#).

This article was last reviewed or updated on December 9, 2024.