

Book review

Feel a Little

Little poems about big feelings

Category: Book Reviews / Children & Youth

Author: Jenny Palmer, Illustrated by Evie Kemp

Year: 2017

Publisher: Little Love, NZ

ISBN: 9780473384456

Audience: For Community

Summary: An illustrated book of poems which will encourage children (and adults) to reflect about their emotional world



Feelings are a big topic in our household. Our household consists of myself and my two tamariki, a 12-year-old with an awesome Asperger's brain and a delightfully demonstrative 6-year-old. Our little whānau of three has also suffered some big losses and changes in the last 18 months, so talking (or attempting to talk) about feelings has been somewhat of a focus.

Feel a Little contains 14 poems, each one about a different feeling with illustrations to match. The day I brought the book home I suggested to my 12-year-old he may like to read some of the poems to his sister. Much grumbling ensued, but he was persuaded to read just one of his choice. So he started with *Happy*:

Happy is a warm glow,
It's a gleam inside your chest;
Then a beam ignites a sparkle,
You feel light and right, your best.

It may have been the bright, bold illustrations, or the easy upbeat rhythms, but many more poems were recited, one after the other with much enthusiasm. However my 6-year-old lost interest quickly, perhaps a few too many feelings being described "at her" all at once. A few days later when I sat down with her one-on-one and focused on one poem she engaged better but still struggled with some of the more complex ideas. One of my favourite children's books about feelings is Dr Suess's *My Many Coloured Days* which very simply captures our changing emotions through only a few words and luscious paintings.

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Feel a Little clearly has an older target audience in mind. I found many of the poems beautifully captured the essence of an emotion, the physical sensations as well as the nuance of how people may experience a feeling. I connected with some more than others, for instance Curious is pointy, you're prickling to know didn't resonate with me at all. However, that was also a wonderful aspect of the book, as it enabled reflection and discussion with children about how they personally experience feelings. What words would they use to describe an emotion?

My 12-year-old really liked how some of the poems gave some advice about how to manage emotions such as *Angry*:

Look out for your boiling point,
The rumbling and the heat;
You will find the warning signs
That only YOU can beat.

Maybe it's just one deep breath,
A count to ten, a walk;
Maybe there's a friend or grown up
There to have a talk.

Although I agreed with him I did find some of the advice contained a few too many "shoulds" and could be a little prescriptive. But apart from that I think the book is a fantastic way to get children (and adults) to reflect more about their emotional world. Giving children a way to explore, discuss and express their feelings, in my opinion, is one of the greatest gifts you can give your children and *Feel a Little* provides an excellent medium to do just that.

Reviewed by Amanda Schulze, Community Engagement & Health Promotion Officer at the Mental Health Foundation

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