



Sue Larkey ([00:04](#)):

Okay. Welcome everybody. I am absolutely thrilled to have Lauren Brukner on the podcast today. She is a senior occupational therapist and currently an evaluator at the NYC department of education and provides consultative services relating to self regulation. Any of you, who come to my face to face workshops now I'm a huge fan of Lauren's book, the kid's guide to being awesome and in control and I must admit, I'm having a little bit of a fan girl moment that I was able to get her on this podcast as I love all her books, which cover all ages to help with self regulation from the divine, how to be a superhero called self control to the keeping calm guru. A link to all the books in the podcast notes and all the books are available on my website and there's more information on each of the books and which age and how I'd use them and lots of little tip sheets, how I use Lauren's books and visuals. So make sure you have a look at that. But they're very practical books. You can just pick them up and use them. So, welcome Lauren.

Lauren Brukner ([01:06](#)):

Thank you for having me. I'm so excited.

Sue Larkey ([01:11](#)):

Now my go to guide of yours is 'The Kid's Guide to Being Awesome.' But that's mainly cause I'm in primary school age. And when it first came out, it was such a game changer for me because we've seen kids who were wriggly, as a teacher, I would see the behavior but didn't know how to help the children actually take control. So you'd see kids always being told, sit still concentrate focus. Whereas what you provided was amazing scaffolding to help them self-regulate. But I'd love to know that's how I use it. Why did you write the book?

Lauren Brukner ([01:44](#)):

Yes. So I wrote my first book when I saw that children were being told how they were feeling by the adults in their life and they were told what strategies that they should use to self regulate with little to no effect. So in my work as a practicing pediatric OT, I began to create a guide, which really was based on child empowerment, right? So it had a uniform language around self regulation, around physical and emotional self regulation. And it also had concrete strategies around small movement exercises, around tools and around big breaks that all corresponded to different states of regulation. But kids had to choose and label how they were feeling and they had the choice to be able to say, this is the tool that would help me feel just right. Or this is the small movement exercise that would help me feel just right, or this is the big break that would help me feel just right. So once I saw that this was really effective, I thought, you know, I'm doing this with a small group of kids. Why not see if I could publish something to really help like the population at large and help as many kids, as many families, as many educators and therapists as I could. So this led to the books that I have today.

Sue Larkey ([03:04](#)):

Yeah, that sounds like what I love about them. That for me it helped give language to the children. So I would see the behavior, but what you gave me was words to tell the children. But what I love is those little breaks so I can tell a child and when they're sitting on the mat they can do the finger pulls or they can do the little seat pushups and it sort of becomes nearly, I'd say we discovered together what works for each child. And I think that's what's really good. And I often say to the kids, look, I wear glasses. Everyone has a different script in their glasses. You have to work out what your script is and different days we need different things. And that's what I love in your book because it sort of addresses all those

different feelings children have. And as a teacher I've probably seen but not understood in such a, it sounds terrible, but a simplistic way, Lauren.

Lauren Brukner ([03:57](#)):

Yeah. Like even just the conversation of you know, my favorite food is hot dogs. Your favorite food is chicken nuggets. No one can tell you what your just right strategy is going to be on that day. And I think that is empowering for the child themselves to hear and just the act of choosing their just right strategy - that is self-regulating in and of itself.

Sue Larkey ([04:17](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And I probably am, I probably should have sent you a picture before, but I use a wheel of calm where I put like two paper plates together and the kids move it around and put the pictures from your book in there and they love it.

Lauren Brukner ([04:32](#)):

Oh my god I would love a picture!

Sue Larkey ([04:32](#)):

Yeah. I'll send you a picture. But particularly from my oppositional defiant disorder kids, who often can't choose in the moment when they're anxious or angry or feeling overwhelmed. So they just spin the wheel around and we've chosen the activities before. So then they're like spin the wheel. Ah, that's what I'm going to do. So, because for my oppositional kids they'd just be like, no, no, no. But now the wheels telling them and I'm not telling them and sort of makes it a fun way to get them to access your amazing stuff. So I put your little pictures in the wheel, but I'll make sure I send you a picture. Look at us teachers, we're always adjusting things to make it practical.

Lauren Brukner ([05:14](#)):

Yeah. That's what I love about teachers also is like you could take these amazing ideas that I would never think of. So that's, that's really great.

Sue Larkey ([05:21](#)):

Yeah, thanks. And so are you working, what age group are you mainly working with now?

Lauren Brukner ([05:28](#)):

So as an evaluator I see kids three to 21. But when I'm treating, I really am treating elementary school age, but when I do treat, I feel like I do get a lot of ideas again from students themselves. So for example, there was a child who was using my how to be a superhero called self control and so he said, Oh my gosh, I use your book, how to be a superhero with him all the time. And he loves the idea of a worry box and he made a worry box for his entire class and he made tickets to check in on everybody's worries that he would go around and give worry box tickets to everybody to do every day, which I would have never thought of. So again, I think kids also come up with the best ideas.

Sue Larkey ([06:15](#)):

Well that's what I love about your books because it empowers them to feel in control. Otherwise it's adults constantly telling them what they need to do. So when we tell children what to do, but I think

that's a life skill. We've all had to learn those things over the years. But for me, that's what I love with all of them. Like even the keeping calm guru, there's kids, particularly girls on the spectrum when, cause I mainly work with kids on the spectrum, that the girls really relate to the pictures and the words and they're normally avid readers. But it gives them a language where they can then tell it back to me. Whereas before they probably only had behavior to communicate with me about their feelings and emotions. So it's sort of like, I call it emotional literacy, but the books, because of the lovely pictures and the way you've done it, it really does give them that.

Sue Larkey ([07:04](#)):

But I love that ticket idea. And in Australia we've got kids coming back to school at the moment. Unfortunately in the primary, some of the kids are only going one day a week, two days a week because we can't have lots of kids. So I just say to all my listeners that have those books hiding in their school, the Superhero and Awesome. Great time to pull it out. I think for all kids, it's a really anxious time. Yeah, absolutely. And for my families listening. How have you used it with families? Have you used it much like with one on one families, the books?

Lauren Brukner ([07:38](#)):

Yes. And I think in a similar way that I would with schools as well, it's just kind of, let's say that I would put visuals near the learning space. You might want to create a cool down area in the home as well and JKP has downloadable visual guides. You would want to download them and just put them in the learning space or creating a cool down space with your child. You're empowering your students. You are empowering your child to use that language as well. I've spoken to children where they say, I feel like my teachers and my parents are telling me what to do all day long. So I want to have the choice to be able to label, I like to be able to say I'm feeling slow and tired or I'm feeling fast and emotional, which we can get into in a little bit.

Lauren Brukner ([08:23](#)):

But just the act of choosing the strategies that they want to do. I think parents and teachers just being able to model the supports and for example, my children do deep breaths, right, which we call bubble breath because that's what I am modeling. And I think especially now, because there's so much stress going on, if we can model and say I'm feeling fast, nimble, slow. Or if I'm feeling worried and then modeling the strategy that is more helpful than telling our children to go to the visual or go to the book because our children are seeing what we're doing. So that would be like one of my big recommendations to do right now is because our children are always watching.

Sue Larkey ([09:08](#)):

Yeah. So true. Now were you just saying you can download the visuals on Jessica Kingsley's website. I'll make sure I link to that. I didn't realize they were there, I'm always madly trying to open the books and photocopy them without ruining them cause they're beautiful hardbacks, which is what I love, but as a teacher. Okay. I'll make sure I link to that in that. And you just mentioned, was it the fast and wiggly? No, the tired and, I'm having a moment. Yeah. So can you give, can you talk through that, cause what I like is you do talk through all the different ways kids can feel. Can you just sort of talk that through for someone who maybe doesn't know the books but is keen to understand it a bit better?

Lauren Brukner ([09:50](#)):

Yes. So, okay. So there's four different ways that we can label our feelings. So we always want to get to the state of just right. Just right, I say, is not perfect. It's just being able to do what we need to do. So we can be a little tired, we could be a little stressed, we could be a little bit active, but we're able to self regulate and get to the point of engaging with others, doing our work or whatever. Then we have slow and tired. Slow and tired is we're so low energy, we're so exhausted that we are not able to do what we need to do. So that is the first one. Then we have fast and wiggly. Fast and wiggly is, I know these names are for little kids. Fast and wiggly is we're so high energy that we can't control our wiggles. We are upset. We can't do, I keep saying we can't do what we need to do because that's the key, right? We can't self-regulate. We can't engage with others. Fast and emotional. Fast and emotional is we are so, we have such extreme anxiety. We have such extreme frustration. We might be so super silly that we can't move on. We're so emotionally stuck that we're not able to engage with our family or friends and we can't move on. We're always trying to get to the point of just right. So those are the four states of regulation. Then we always want to connect our strategies to those feelings, right? So we have anywhere body breaks, tools and big body breaks. See stop me if I'm talking too much.

Sue Larkey ([11:29](#)):

No, this is great. This is so good. I'm nodding away. It's a shame people. That's the problem with audio, people can't see. But just going back, what I love is the way that just right. And also getting kids to understand there's more than one, like, you can be wiggly for a number of reasons, or you can be emotional for a number of reasons and you might be emotional cause you're tired. And that's I like about your books that it helps children have the language and the skills. But keep going cause loving, you're saying go for it.

Lauren Brukner ([12:00](#)):

Okay. And I should also say that kids and adults are not only one thing necessarily. You could be right fast and wiggly and fast and emotional. You could be fast and wiggly, slow and tired and fast and emotional. So we don't only have to choose one thing, right? We also are going to connect our feelings to our strategies. The first one, strategy along the self continuum of self reg... the continuum of self regulation is anywhere body breaks. Anywhere body breaks are small movement exercises, right? Sometimes they're cognitive based. We can do them anywhere. So an example would be a finger pull and we don't have this, we don't have like you're not seeing the video, but you have it, you can download it or it's in the back of the book. But it's in our hands. We link it to our state of regulation.

New Speaker ([12:49](#)):

So let's say I'm fast and wiggly. I'm going to label my feeling as fast and wiggly. I'm going to think in my mind where are my fast and wiggly feelings. I'm going to think, okay, maybe they're in my feet, maybe they're in my hands. I'm going to scoop them up. I'm going to put them into my finger pull and I'm going to pull, pull, pull, pull, pull until I'm able to move on and do what I need to do. Which is what? It's just right. The important bit is I'm linking my feelings to my strategy. Otherwise, what am I doing? I'm doing a strategy. Yes, I'm doing a movement. Yes. Are there scientific elements there? Yes. I'm crossing midlines. I'm doing deep pressure. Will it help? To an extent, yes, but the real empowering component where the child is taking control over feelings that are overwhelming is that they're labeling their feeling and doing something tangible with it.

Sue Larkey ([13:47](#)):

Absolutely. And for my Aspergers kids, like you know, the Spectrum's messy now, but I still use the word autism and Aspergers, but for my Asperger's kids, they love logic and I think that's what they enjoy about the books most. It's sort of like mathematics for your emotions. Like where am I feeling it? How am I feeling now? Sometimes I'll get my kid to go what number, one to five, one to 10? How big is that? What do we need to do? So it's sort of giving them a formula what to do and then as you say, makes them feel in control. And what I find so fantastic, they feel good about themselves after rather than sitting them in time out where they don't know why they were there or what to do to fix it. And for many of my kids actually escalates it and then they'll start misbehaving, they're actually taking a break and using that in a positive way and really building lifelong skills, is the way I see it, that they're building strategies they'll be able to use throughout their life because all we need to self regulate. You know, we're all doing that.

Lauren Brukner ([14:51](#)):

Yes. And I think that adults feel this way a lot of times. And I think sometimes we can forget. I know as a parent I'll forget. I think even as a therapist, I'll forget and I think we'll find ourselves doing things without thinking about it. And I think it's important for kids to be able to feel these emotionally overwhelming and physically overwhelming feelings, and to say, okay, it's okay to feel this way, but it's also okay to, it's a great feeling, to overcome it and to do something tangible and in control about it. And then to be able to go back and feel confident in themselves that they were able to now move on and just to go back to what they were doing and your right, it's a great life skill.

Lauren Brukner ([15:32](#)):

Also, in the book and then in the JKP website, there's different self monitoring checklists that go according to this. For example, all the anywhere body breaks are in a chart. I don't know if you know where I'm talking about, where it says, okay, which anywhere body breaks do I want to choose? Check them off. Did I do them the right way? Do I feel just right, circle it off? Am I able to go back and do my work? So that's a great one. If there's all those for anywhere breaks, tools and big body breaks. So that's a great one. Especially if children are feeling especially overwhelmed and do well with checklists. That's an option.

Sue Larkey ([16:06](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And again, for my oppositional kids, it's getting them in action, because often that sort of procrastination and not getting in action. So even if they're doing a body break, I'm still getting them in action to then come and do some work. So, if they're doing nothing and they're under a table, it's much harder to get them in action. But if I can say, well, let's get out and do five star jumps and then I'll choose five star jumps, what do you want to choose? And I find, I get to know which breaks which kids need. And so I can sort of direct them or some of the children I've worked with, obviously being nonverbal, that's why I love the book because we've got the visuals to support what we're doing.

Sue Larkey ([16:48](#)):

But I just find it's giving them something to do so they're not feeling like they're lost. It's actually getting them in action. And I mean for me, I know with this whole Corona virus that action overrides anxiety, being in action just really helps you. Sitting around worrying, which what happens with a lot of my kids, and I think why your books, all of them, are so important, because they help the children identify but also then tell them what to do and sort of normalize it. Go, it's okay, we all have this and there's so many things you can do. So yeah, I really get that. So I'll make sure. Yeah. And I love the menu too. And

my kids love that menu at the back where you've got all the different, so the at a glance. It's sort of like, I call it the menu. It's sort of like going to explain to kids it's like going out to a restaurant, sometimes you feel like this, sometimes you feel like that. Well, what's our menu for today? What do you feel like?

Lauren Brukner ([17:46](#)):

There's a lot of food references in all the books cause I actually love food.

Sue Larkey ([17:55](#)):

That's so good. Do you use much of it with your own kids?

Lauren Brukner ([18:00](#)):

Yeah. Yes, yes. And a good tip for parents and for teachers is when you are teaching any of these strategies initially, if you want a good visual is, I've done it with my own kids, you give them a little bracelet .and to minimize the verbal, you can just point to the bracelet. So especially if they're emotionally dysregulated and you want to minimize the language, if there's especially one strategy you're trying to introduce, just point. Right. And if you're giving the child the choice of the bracelet that they want, right? Because again, the more choice that you want to introduce, the more likely that they're going to be empowered and do the strategy. So for example, if it was like a yellow bracelet and it had blue or purple bumps on it, so it was also a fidget. So you point to it, they did the strategy, so minimizing the back and forth language, looked, maybe they fidgeted with it a little bit done. So that helps with the transfer.

Sue Larkey ([18:56](#)):

Yeah. And also in a classroom where teachers often have 30 kids, being able to do something like that, not actually having to say something to the student. Because some of my kids don't like being pointed out. Like if a teacher says their name or says anything they worry. So I love that you can just have little visuals. And that's, some of my kids, I just do 25 minutes work, five minute brain break or body break and they can choose what the break is depending where they're at. And I find that keeps them in a busy classroom more sensory regulated. And as a teacher I don't have to be constantly looking at them cause I know every 25 minutes they're going to be checking where they're at, working out what they need. And for any parents who are listening, cause we have people listen all over the world, who are doing learning at home. I highly recommend 25 minutes work, five minutes break from Lauren's book, and then they've got some things to do in that break. And you can quickly do a body break and then get back to work. But sitting for hours at the moment, it's not healthy for anyone.

Lauren Brukner ([20:02](#)):

Right. And if the child knows that they're having the break coming, then they're more likely to sit and do the work.

Sue Larkey ([20:08](#)):

They love it. They race through their work to get to the break, like I'm going to go quicker. And I feel bad sometimes because the 25 minutes is still 25 minutes. But I think they know that they're going to get up and move and it's something to look forward to, you know? And if you make it fun and the truth is they feel better after, so why wouldn't you seek it more if you have that five minute break and then feel better than, feeling slumpy and had enough or wriggly or tired or whatever. That's so good. And is there any other little tips or hints you can give to my audience?

Lauren Brukner ([20:46](#)):

Yes. So we started with anywhere breaks, right? The next step along the continuum would be the use of tools. So the use of tools is when the anywhere body breaks are not enough. And similarly to the anywhere breaks is that we're connecting our state of regulation to the use of tools. Examples of tools would be the use of a cushion, the use of a fidget, the use of a weighted lap pad. If we're using a tool without meaning, a lot of times kids are not going to use it the right way. So we can think of, for example, a spiky fidget is great for slow and tired feelings. A firm fidget is really good for fast and emotional and fast and wiggly feelings. Again, we have the reference guide in the back of the book and on the JKP website.

New Speaker ([21:34](#)):

For example, let's say I'm feeling slow and tired. I'm going to take my slow and tired feelings and I'm going to squeeze, squeeze, squeeze and into the use of the spiky fidget until I'm feeling better and I'm able to move on. The use of, or the creation of, a sensory toolbox, it is important that you're having your students or your child be active co-facilitators, co-creators of the box. So the more they're active within the process, the more likely that they're going to use it the right way, right? If they feel like, Oh, you made this for me, I had no choice in what you put in there. Why am I using this? This is just something that you made for me. I don't like any of it. None of it works. If you ask them, you know, I was thinking that I could make this as like a classic toolbox. What do you think? What would help you guys feel just right? And maybe each student, you know, wrote some ideas down or maybe your child if you're at home, some ideas down. That's going to be more effective.

New Speaker ([22:38](#)):

Having kids write down some rules for how to use it the right way, having one by the learning area and maybe having a cool-down space in the back and having a separate one there. Right? So just having different options. We can get into the use of a cool down space later, but a cool down space is an area where the child's going to go if they need to take space or in times of emotionality, that's separate, where they can kind of get it together, calm down, and then rejoin when they're feeling just right. So that's the use of tools next.

New Speaker ([23:12](#)):

Next, would be the use of big body breaks. Big body breaks are whole body. So again, first was anywhere breaks, then we did tools. So now none of those worked or they didn't work enough. Now we're going to do big breaks. We could look at the use of big body breaks in two ways. We can look at it as preemptive or as needed. We're going to look preemptively, which I like sometimes, we can say maybe you want to do like, three in the morning, three after lunch, three before dismissal. If you look in the back of the book again or on the JKP website, there are examples. If you want to do it preemptively on the rug, a lot of them involve movement. So what you would do is you would do them in a stationary way and have the kids hold the position. And you just need to maybe have the conversation that everyone has a personal space bubble and we need to be careful that our feet are not in anyone's face and that it might not work the first time.

New Speaker ([24:15](#)):

But you know, we're teaching you personal space and self control. And you know, you could maybe if there's a child to have some difficulty with self-control, maybe that child's the leader. So you're giving that child empowerment and you're making them, maybe they have a little difficulty with wanting to be

silly. You're turning it around on them and maybe they're gonna work on that body control because they want to be the leader. If you want to do it as an as needed basis also or or, what I would recommend against is having it outside the classroom because a lot of times the kids who need that extra input have difficulty with transitions.

Sue Larkey ([24:57](#)):

So true.

Lauren Brukner ([24:58](#)):

And difficulty with body control. So if we're going outside the classroom, what I do find is it, they're going to be running up and down the hallway and if they're going in, right, in and out of the classroom, they're transitioning. So we lost any of the effects of the powerful proprioception and the big movements. You can make an area in your classroom out of painter's tape and make it really big, as big as you can to start and then make it smaller and smaller. And so if you're in the classroom, they're still part of the class.

Sue Larkey ([25:33](#)):

Love it.

Lauren Brukner ([25:34](#)):

Right. So that's what I would say to do. And put the visuals near near that area.

Sue Larkey ([25:38](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah. But that makes so much sense with the transitioning in and out. Cause it is. That's when I worked in an autism school, we did research on when most behavior happened and it was transition, from outside to inside, from the bathroom back to the classroom. Whenever there was those big movements, that's when you got the running up and down and things you're describing. So I love it when I'm learning and thinking differently and you're like, Oh yeah, that makes so much. I love it. I love it. I love it.

Lauren Brukner ([26:07](#)):

Yeah. And you can make it like a game. Like, Oh, the tape is lava or you're swimming. And that is, I dunno, the rock. So it's just making it fun and engaging. Or the child is choosing the whatever the tape is. So that's what I would say. Those are some tips. So right then just goes along the continuum.

Sue Larkey ([26:26](#)):

Yeah, that is so good. I'm this, my goodness, this is jam packed. I'm going to have to put a lot of notes in the podcast notes, jam packed with ideas to try and implement and just, what I love about your books as I say, is that just giving the kids language, talking about your own emotions, and we all feel this way and this is what I do, might be the bubble breathing. But also what I find is I say, well, I tried that today and it didn't work. So now I've got to try different thing, and letting them see that different continuum of we need different things at different times. I think it's so powerful and so fantastic. Well, I'm conscious, I told you we'd be like half an hour and it's gone so fast.

New Speaker ([27:09](#)):

I know! This was fun!

Sue Larkey ([27:15](#)):

But I really appreciate, I feel like people have got so many tips and strategies and really appreciate your time and I'll make sure I send you the calm wheel, but I'll also make sure I'll put some of the visuals in the podcast notes so that people can sort of see what we're talking about. And I might even take a few photos of the hand holds and things so people can see, because the more people who can use your books, the better it is. And, it's so much better to be positive with kids than getting negative and telling them stop crawling round. It's so much more fun to say we need to do a body break, and so really thank you so much for writing these amazing books and for sharing with us on the podcast today. And thank you and stay safe.

Lauren Brukner ([28:01](#)):

Yes, you too. Thank you so much for having me.

New Speaker ([28:04](#)):

My absolute pleasure. Well, what a fantastic jam packed podcast. I think you're definitely going to have to go to the podcast notes for that one and download some of the visuals. And I'll make sure I clearly explain some of the things that Lauren was going through as far as helping kids with body breaks. For those of you who are interested in understanding more about emotional regulation or knowing how I use those wheel of calm, I have a masterclass, which is for people that have done Tony Attwood's or my courses who said, look, they love those courses, but they wanted more help with helping children regulate their emotions. So it's a three hour course that really dives in to helping children regulate their emotions, understanding their emotions and what to do, but also lots of the strategies you can use every day in your classrooms to help all children with self regulation. So a bit like Lauren's books, that's just sort of one of the strategies I use. But there's lots of other things I use.

New Speaker ([29:05](#)):

So at the moment there is a \$20 off, actually no it's \$50 off though. So till May 24th, if you're interested, if you're in Australia, it's \$50 Aussie dollars off, wherever else you are in the world. Obviously the dollars depending. But the good news about it's online anywhere, self paced and I must say the reviews from that course are amazing and I get so much feedback about what a huge difference it's made to kids and to teachers, a little bit like Lauren and myself were talking about, it's just so much more fun teaching in a calm classroom, but also having the tools to create a calm classroom. So hope that you get some great strategies from this podcast. Parents, I hope you've got some good ideas too. And I look forward to seeing you on the next podcast.

1



How to be a Superhero Called Self-Control

By Lauren Brukner

Narrated by a superhero called Self-Control, this illustrated book provides a variety of super power strategies to help children with emotional and sensory regulation difficulties, aged approximately 4 to 7 years to master self-control.

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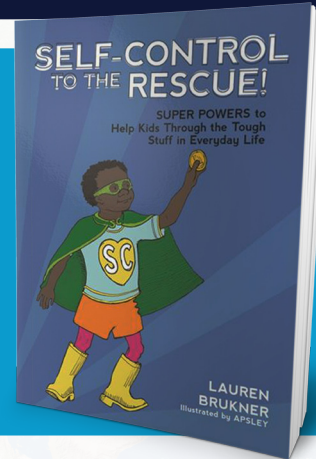
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By Lauren Brukner

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3



The Kids Guide to Staying Awesome and In Control

By Lauren Brukner

From breathing exercises, pressure holds and finger pulls, to fidgets, noise-reducing headphones and gum, this book is brimming with fun stuff to help kids feel cool, calm and collected. They will learn how to label difficult feelings, choose the perfect strategies and tools to tackle them, and use the se correctly whether at home or at school.

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4

Stay Cool and In Control with the Keep-Calm Guru

By Lauren Brukner

Meet the Keep-Calm Guru, our expert guide to the art of staying cool, calm, and in control in the face of overpowering feelings! This illustrated book introduces wise ways for children to recognise and cope with anxiety, anger, frustration, and other difficult emotions. Using everything from yoga poses and pressure holds, to deep breathing and relaxing colouring activities.

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