Once I Was Very Very Scared

by Chandra Ghosh Ippen

illustrations by Erich Ippen jr.
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For grown-ups around the world who help children feel protected and cherished, for all the children they love, and for Reidan, our son, who is very very loved.
The publisher, author, and illustrator take no responsibility for the use of these materials. Please review them and determine if they are appropriate for your specific needs. This book is not intended as a substitute for treatment from a mental health provider. The reader should consult with a mental health provider for any symptoms that may need diagnosis or professional attention.

Summary: Once I was very very scared, declared squirrel. The other animals chimed in to share that they were also once scared. Through the story we learn what scared the little animals, ways they each respond when scared, and things that help them feel safe and calm. This book was designed to help young children who have experienced stressful or traumatic events.

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Umm...
Once, I was very very scared.

Me too.

Me too.
Me too.

So scared.
Not me. I'm never scared.

r...r...ribbit
I don't like to talk about it.
I wonder what scared you.
The wind. It was so loud. It hurt my house. My toys were broken. The nuts went everywhere. The whole place was shaking.

I saw someone get hurt.

...rb...bit...
Someone I love left. I don’t like it when people leave. They leave a lot.

People were fighting. I hid, but they kept fighting. They went on and on.
People started yelling. No one wanted me around. I got scared, and I sprayed. They yelled more, and I sprayed more.

I don’t remember what happened, but it was bad. I worry bad things might happen again.
Someone hurt me, but no one’s ever gonna hurt me again. I can bite, and I can growl!

GRRRRR...
Stop it. I don’t like when you do that.

ARF!! ARF!!

ARF!!

ARF!! ARF!!

You’re scaring me.

ARF!!

You’re so loud.

He’s so loud.

rrr...rrr
Hey, why'd you do that?

Go away, or I'll do it again.

My heart is beating so fast I want to run.

Please don't go.
I need to run.
I need to go home and find my family.

Hey! Where's turtle?

I hear that you want your family, and I know you want to move. Let's find a safe way for you to move around.
Turtle please don’t go away.

Leave me alone. My tummy hurts.

I don’t like what dog did with the barking and the growling and the running around and making noise! It’s very scary, and I don’t like it. I don’t like when bad things happen. I don’t like it at all!

rrr...rib...

I have to go to the bathroom.
Are you OK?

I don't like this.

grrr...rr?
Oh, it seems like you all got upset, but you show how you feel in different ways.

Let’s think together about what might help.

I’m so sorry someone hurt you before. No one is going to hurt you here.
I know I look prickly. People sometimes worry that I might poke them, but I won’t. I might get frustrated or a little mad because it’s hard when things get crazy, but I won’t hurt you.

You smell OK.

Thank you. I’ll try hard to earn your trust, but I know it might take time.
You were really loud. I have very sensitive ears.

Yes, that’s true. You don’t like it when things are loud.

When dog barked, I don’t think he meant to scare you. He was just trying to show what he would do if anyone tried to bother him.
Well, here if anyone bothers you, it’s my job to help them learn not to bother you. It’s my job to keep you safe. Here you don’t need to growl or bark. You can just tell me what’s happening, and I will listen to you. Then we will decide what to do.

Can we try that?

Yes, but I might forget.

That’s ok. You are learning, and we will help you learn. We want this to be a safe place where you don’t need to bark or growl.

Or bite.

That’s true. Biting is not safe. Sometimes it is hard for us to talk about what is going on inside us or figure out how we can calm down.
When you feel scared, or when you have other hard feelings like sad, angry, frustrated, embarrassed, or ashamed, what do you do?

Sad

Angry

Embarrassed

Scared

Frustrated

Ashamed
I hide...
...and my tummy hurts.

I lose my voice, and all I can say is croak croak. I want to say more. I want to yell and say how scared I am, but all that comes out is croak.

I remember what my Mommy says. She says we should share our feelings and talk about what scares us.

Oh, and sometimes I eat. Nuts make me feel better...

Oh, and I don't sleep very well.

...and sometimes I talk too much.

I jump up and run fast...
...and sometimes I get hurt.
I become a real stinker.

I pretend I'm not here, but pretty soon I'm not pretending. I really feel like I'm not here, and I don't know where I am.

I find someone to hold onto and hug. Some people don't like it when I do that.
What about you?

I growl, and I bark. When I do, people don't bother me.

I don't like to talk about it.
That's true. You don't like to talk about it. Maybe it's scary to talk about bad things that happened.

MmmHmm.

Even though you don't like to talk about it, I wonder if you think about it.

Often?

Almost all the time.
You have all been through a lot, and it makes sense that you feel this way, but it also seems like you need help, so you don't keep feeling this way.

Maybe we can learn new things to do that help us when we feel scared or mad or sad.
That year, all the little animals learned lots of things. They learned how to write their names. They learned how to play fun games.

And very, very importantly, they learned what they could do when they were scared, angry, sad and feeling bad inside.
Music helps me calm down.

I talked to my mom, and she said she was very sorry that someone hurt me. This makes me feel much better.

I still like to run, but I also found a safe place where I can be calm and snuggle.

I will keep you safe and make sure no one ever hurts you again.
I play water ball with friends and that makes me feel so good.

My dad said that bad things don't usually happen and that makes me feel better.

I learned to breathe. When I get scared, I pay attention to the air going in and out of my body and that helps me calm down.
I learned I’m really a cool skunk and not a little stinker, and I have friends who care about me and want me around.

I learned that even though people sometimes go away, there are people I love who always come back.

I find that a cup of tea and a little support helps me.

I learned I can trust some people.
And I learned that it's good to talk about things... ...sometimes.
Thanks for watching!
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