

Book review

Release the Beast

Category: Book Reviews / Non-fiction

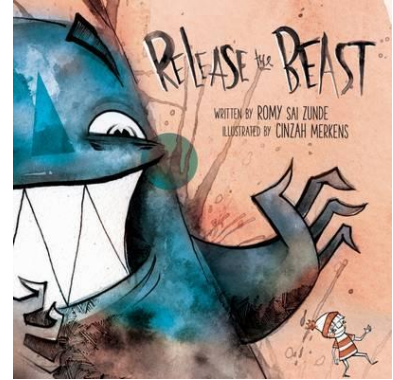
Author: Romy Sai Zunde, illustrated by Cinzah Merkens

Year: 2014

Publisher: Beatnik Publishing, NZ

ISBN: 9780992264819

Audience: For Youth



Summary: A picture book exploring the issues of anger and frustration with children

“When I get mad, the beast boils in my bones, he stomps in my feet and roars in my mouth.”

In *Release the Beast*, Romy Sai Zunde explores children’s anger and frustration in a fun but clever way. The book could be a useful tool to starting the conversation about anger with a child.

The story follows a young boy who goes through various stages of feeling angry, with the beast personifying his out-of-control, angry feelings. Being told to share toys with his little brother wakes up the beast. The boy describes all the imaginary things the beast would do. The illustrations are expressive, interesting and dramatic. After the beast is let out – “then I felt a little bit better”.

The book identifies that there can be lots of different triggers for anger and distress, like being told what to do, and feeling like you are being treated unfairly; “Grown-ups are naughty all the time, and no one tells them what to do”. As children are early in the process of developing skills and strategies to manage intense (and sometimes confusing) feelings like anger, it’s an important area for children to be able to talk about and understand.

Using the beast to identify anger

Viewing anger as a beast helps it to be discussed and therefore could help children to identify feelings of anger – an important first step in being able to self-manage emotions. Some of the metaphors and pictures might be a little complicated (and some a bit dark) for younger ones to understand – however the underlying message is still effective.

In a subtle way, *Release the Beast* touches on the brain’s inability to process information clearly when angry or distressed – “mummy yelled and yelled but the beast and I couldn’t hear a thing”.

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The book finishes with the boy apologising and the mother having a conversation about her own anger and what her beast does when she's angry and frustrated with different things. It's an important ending, because it normalises anger as something healthy and human, which everyone experiences – even adults who, from a child's perspective, often seem like they have everything under control and don't have these challenges. It also suggests that honest conversations about challenges with others can help you feel better.

While *Release the Beast* doesn't seem to offer clear strategies for managing feelings of anger, reading the book might open an opportunity for a conversation about anger, how it is a normal, important response and also how to express it in healthy ways.

Reviewed by Michelle Dendale, Information Officer at the Mental Health Foundation

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