

Surviving the Storm...

A Mum's COVID Story



Suzanne Pearson

Welcome to the Sharing Parenting Surviving the Storm picture book. We hope you enjoy the book and are able to reflect on how the key messages might benefit you and your family. Before you begin the book, I would like to share a little bit about myself, Sharing Parenting, why the book was written and the importance of staying connected and building resilience – which are key messages in this book.

I have worked in Parent Education for over 30 years with parents, carers and training professionals. I am a psychologist and counsellor that feels passionate about support for parents and I really do believe that raising children, the next generation, is the most important job in the world. As a mother, I have found writing this book personally helpful as I know only too well how we all go through storms in our lives.

What is Sharing Parenting?

Sharing Parenting is a community interest, evidence-based, Parenting Company established in 2009. We deliver parenting support in the form of Courses, Workshops, Taster Sessions, and One to One support for **parents to gain confidence and knowledge in their role as parents. We also deliver a range of training for professionals supporting parents and carers.** WE work hard to *normalise* parenting support.

Many parents and professionals tell us time and time again that our programmes and support has **made a significant difference to both their and their children's lives.** We hope that this book can make some small difference to you.

Why the book was written.

This book was written to honour and celebrate all those parents and carers who had the courage and resilience to last through the Covid-19 lockdown of Spring 2020.

Suzanne Pearson



How to use this book

Reading the picture book

- In this book, the storm has been used to illustrate any outside threat to you and your family's security e.g. bereavement, debt, being made homeless, losing your job, falling out with family and friends...
- As you read the story, think about each stage: What would you do? How would you feel? How would it affect your family?
- After you have read the story, look at the workbook pages.

Using the wellbeing pages.

- There is one workbook page for each of the stages Kirsty goes through.
- We suggest 10-15 minutes for each of these pages.
- There are a range of exercises on each page of the workbook. Please choose the activities that are relevant to you. Use a notebook and pen to write down your answers to the questions.
- Practise the mindfulness activities.
- It can help to reflect on your answers. Is there anything you could do differently that would build your resilience and develop your connections with family and friends?

Parenting Box

This box always contains a parenting tip that will help you and your child to build resilience and develop connections.

Organised

Normal life for Kirsty is very routine and organised. The children go to school and she goes to work. At the end of the day there are after school clubs, homework and home routines. Everyone is happy and enjoying spending time with family and friends.



Managing

The storm is approaching. Kirsty feels super-organised as she tries to manage the situation. Her routine changes, school closes, she's working from home and has reduced contact with family and friends. Life is changing.



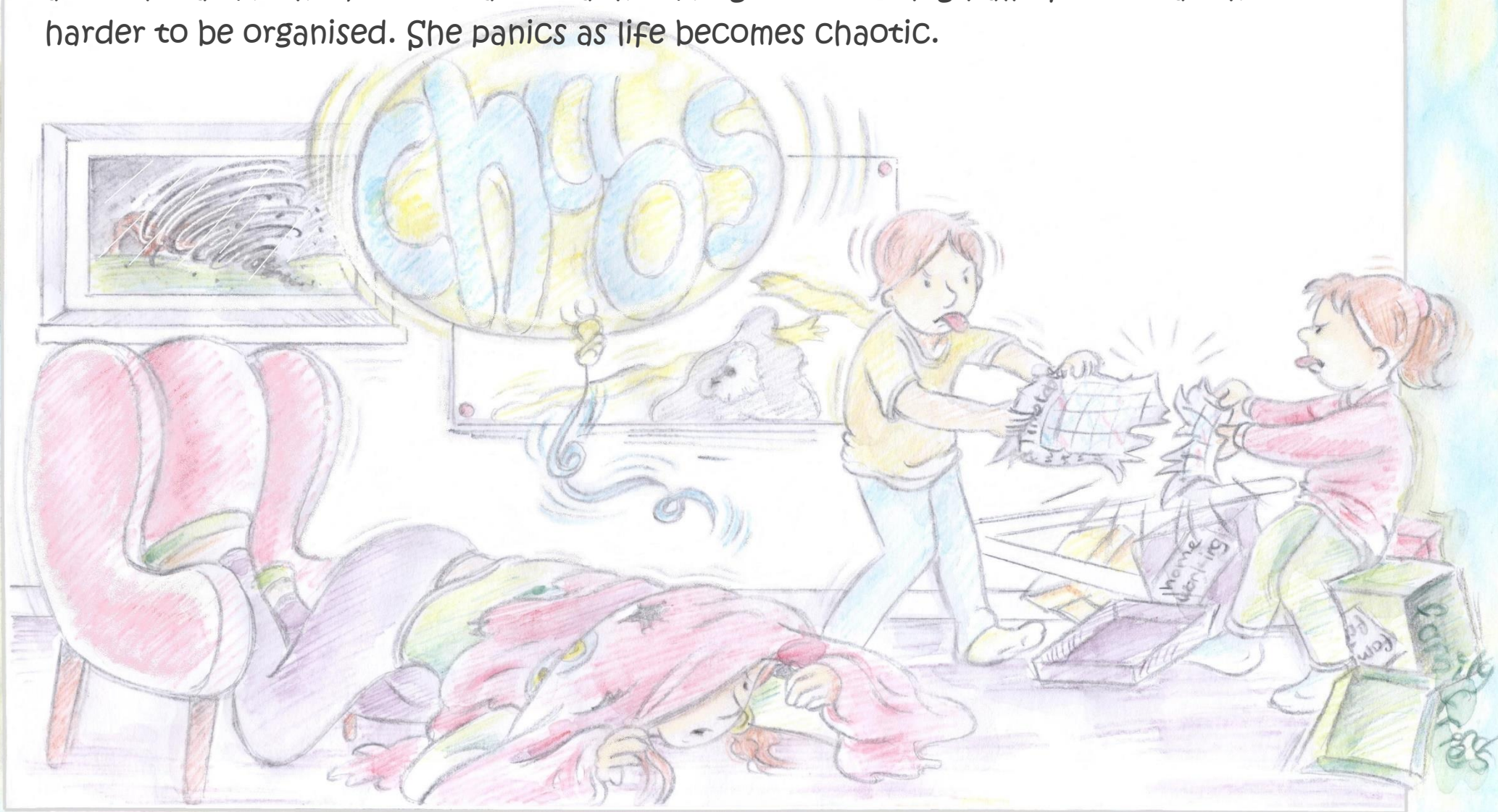
Lost

As the storm rages, Kirsty has the feeling that there is no end in sight. Each day blends into the next. Her routines and normal strategies are not working. She is beginning to feel overwhelmed, isolated and alone.



Chaos

The storm hits and shakes Kirsty's life as it builds and continues endlessly. All her tasks and roles as mother, worker and teacher merge into one big ball of stress as she tries harder to be organised. She panics as life becomes chaotic.



Empty

Kirsty cannot think what to do next and how to change the situation. She is feeling empty and has nothing left to give. She feels helpless and doesn't know what to do. She just can't do it anymore.



Relief

Kirsty accepts that she can't do it all on her own and she chooses to get some support. She shares her feelings and fears with family and friends. The relief of getting time off work allows her to feel better and think about changes she could make. She is able to spend more quality time with the children.



Courage

Kirsty thinks about what she can realistically do. By connecting with family and friends she finds the strength and courage to be more positive. She prioritises what really matters right now. Everyone is happy.



Wellbeing Worksheets



Organised

When things are going well, it's easy not to think about our own resilience and how we build it. But like a muscle, it has to be worked on.

If we work on our own resilience before the storm arrives, we are in a better place to deal with the storm when it arrives.

Gratitude helps build resilience. It builds optimism and self-esteem, giving us strength and courage. Remember to appreciate the small things.

Identify one thing a day that you are grateful for.

It's important to have balance in our lives.

Think of a typical day and list 10 activities you do. Put an F against those that feed you and a D against those that drain you. e.g.

- breakfast with the children D
- shower F
- take the children to school D/F
- go to work D/F
- meet friends and colleagues F

How does your day look? Is it balanced?

Do you have enough tasks in your day that help to build you up? How can you reduce the tasks that drain you?

Self-Talk

When life is normal, we often don't notice our self-talk. Self-talk is those things we tell ourselves in our head about ourselves.

When things are going well and we feel good about ourselves, our self-talk is positive

- I've made a nice meal.
- That worked out well.

When we feel bad about ourselves, our self-talk is critical and judgemental, affecting our self-esteem and courage.

Think of something you feel good about today. Record your self-talk.

Parenting Box

Children want to be like us; they watch what we do and say. We are their role model. Promote gratitude with your children. Help them to recognise what they are grateful for in the day by making gratitude a daily family game. Help them appreciate what others do for them.

- Aren't we lucky to have a park nearby?
- I enjoy playing with you.

Managing

How do we deal with life when a storm is approaching, when we know that things are changing? We often become **more** organised and try to use the same familiar strategies. Sometimes, this will work.

However, there may be times we need to use new strategies. It is important to reflect on what we have learned from previous storms and recognise the strengths we have building up our resilience.

Think of the last time a storm came into your life or there was a major change e.g. new job, bereavement, loss of friendship...
Jot down:

- What happened?
- How did it feel?
- Who was your support?
- What did you do?
- What was your self-talk like?

Reflect on the outcome...

- What was the key learning for you?
- Is there anything you would do differently?

Strengths

Recognising, focusing and building on our strengths can help us cope when our resilience is low, and storms come into our lives.

Strengths

List 5 strengths you have e.g.

- I am a good listener.
- I have the courage to try things.
- I can take time for myself to relax.

Your strengths can help you to cope with the storm.

Self-Talk

When things start to change, and storms are looming, this is a good time to monitor your self-talk. We need a lot of resilience and courage in a storm, so we need to make sure that the messages we tell ourselves in our head are positive, not critical or judgemental. What messages do you need to tell yourself as a storm approaches?

Remind yourself of your strengths. Write down 5 things you can say to yourself in the mirror every morning.

- I can choose what's important.
- I know how to look after my child.
- I can ask for help if I need to.
- There are lots of people who will help me.

Parenting Box

Catch your child being good. Each day find one thing your child does and tell them out loud how pleased/proud/happy you are with them.

Then, say to them, "You must be feeling pleased/proud/happy with yourself."

Lost

When we are feeling lost our self-esteem and self-worth take a dive. None of our strategies that normally work are effective. We need to find ways to build our self-esteem and start feeling good about ourselves in order to help build our courage.

A big part of self-esteem is self-acceptance – important at a time when we feel lost and may feel very critical of ourselves and the situation.

Self-acceptance helps us to feel better about who we are, independent of achievements and flaws. It stops us thinking we have to 'fix' ourselves. It encourages us to accept who we are, our strengths and weaknesses so we begin to like ourselves and build our self-esteem.

Reflect on some of the self-limiting critical thoughts you may have about yourself.

- I can't do anything right.
- I'm rubbish.
- I should have done something sooner.

How could you replace these thoughts with kinder, more balanced thoughts that promote self-acceptance?

What would you tell a friend who was self-critical?

The more we notice critical, negative self-talk the better we become at challenging it and the stronger our self-esteem and courage becomes.

We can reframe some of these statements.

Change *should* to *could*, this gives us back the power to make decisions.

- I can't believe I blew it... I had the courage to try.
- I can't do anything right... I'm good enough.
- I should have acted sooner... I'm taking control now.

Make a list of 3 things that are going well e.g.

- I get out of bed in the morning.
- The children get breakfast and are warm and safe.
- I am cooking food.

Mindfulness Task – Concentrating on the here and now helps us to ground ourselves and clear our minds. Sometimes we just need to change how we view ourselves and stop the critical judgements. One way of doing this is through our Mindfulness practice, through meditation and affirmations. Sit quietly, scan the body, notice any stress then concentrate on the feet. Begin to follow your breath in and out the body – then simply repeat to yourself “may I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be free from fear.”

Please consider seeking professional advice, eg. doctor or counsellor, if your feelings persist.

Parenting Box

When things change, children also need to feel confident - Build their courage by really listening to them. When we really listen, we repeat to the child what they have said (without judging it) then try to reflect how we think they might be feeling.

Chaos

When we are in the middle of a storm in our life sometimes it's hard to see the way through and we try to recreate some kind of normal life within the storm. It takes a lot of energy to manage our thoughts, feelings and actions during a storm and maintain our self-esteem and courage. Acceptance of a situation - recognising what we cannot change and what we can change - stops us thinking we have to fix everything.

Acceptance and choice – a parable.

An intrepid traveller walked down a long and dusty road. He passed a shepherd tending to his flock and asked, "What kind of weather are we going to have today?"

The Shepherd answered, "The kind of weather I like."

The Traveller asked, "But how do you know it will be the kind of weather you like?"

The Shepherd answered "Having found out, sir, that I cannot always get what I like, I have learned to always like what I get. So, I am quite sure we will have the kind of weather I like."

So, the Shepherd chose to be open and flexible to what life gave him. By accepting what he couldn't change the Shepherd practiced non-resistance.

It's as though his personal mantra was, "**Right now, it's like this**". Acceptance of the things you cannot change will release you from the stress and worry of trying to change them - giving you space to concentrate on what you can change.

Draw a magic wand. How would you like the storm to end if you could wave your magic wand? Note down 3 ideas.

"The best thing one can do when it is raining is let it rain."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Mindfulness

When the storm hits, we need our sense of security and help to try to maintain as clear and peaceful a mind as possible. This helps us to think more clearly and make better decisions.

One way to do this is to simply notice your breathing. Repeatedly breathe deeply and count 10 breaths just for a few minutes every day.

Parenting Box

Children will realise that you are stressed, and that life is different however much we try to maintain some routine. Without us realising, they may also be feeling anxious about the situation and their behaviour may change and at times be more challenging.

Simple mindfulness breathing, counting breath may also help children. Show them how you count your breath and do it together. You may also try breathing buddies where children put a soft toy on the chest/belly and watch it go up and down as they breathe, slowing it down and speeding up.

Empty

When we feel empty, we can feel there is nothing left we can do that will make a difference. We begin to feel helpless and discouraged. Our mind may be filled with limiting critical thoughts.

Be aware that these thoughts might be in your mind when you are feeling empty or blank.

- When is this all going to be normal again?
- I can't manage the relentlessness of the situation.
- When is life going to go back to normal?
- I can't do this.
- Something bad is going to happen.
- I'm the only one going through this.

Connect with Others

It is important during this time that we find support, connecting and meeting with others we trust. Feeling safe to talk about our feelings and build our courage.

- Who can you talk to?
- Who do you trust?
- Make connections.

Note down three people you could connect with.

Note down ideas about what you find helps you, e.g.

- Finding the time and space to stop.
- Being realistic about what you can change.
- Telling yourself that nothing 'bad' is going to happen.
- Thinking about what you ARE achieving.
- Focus on the here and now, today.

Helplessness

When we feel helpless, we are discouraged. Begin to recognise simple things you are doing that are working e.g.

- My child is fed, happy, in bed and asleep. I've done something right today.

Find courage by doing some small, new activity e.g. plant some seeds, try a new recipe.

Accept that you are vulnerable, not perfect, and that talking to someone will help. These days will pass.

Mindfulness

This visualisation helps us to clear out negative thoughts and worries and help to create a peaceful mind.

As you breathe in – visualise breathing in white, clear, peaceful light.

As you breathe out, visualise letting out all the worries, critical thoughts and anxieties as black smoke.

Try to let go of judgements and fully accept yourself for the beautiful person you are.

Parenting Box

When we feel empty, children may be aware of many of our feelings as they watch our body language and listen to us. They may feel worried and anxious. They need to know that you and they will be ok. The best thing you can give them is time. Talk to them about how they feel. Watch while they do things that they enjoy. Agree simple consistent routines to help them feel safe and display them on the fridge.

Relief

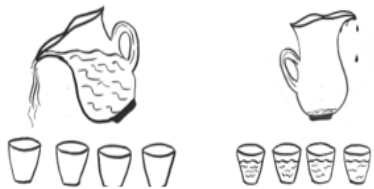
How can you be more conscious of how you feel, your expectations of yourself? Be realistic about what you can and can't achieve. Take a step back to define what you need in your life and how you get these needs met. What is important to you and how can you achieve this?

Think about what your needs and the language you use. Consciously, start more sentences with *I*.

- I need
- I think
- I can
- I do

Write at least one sentence beginning with each of these phrases. What can you do to make sure your needs are met?

Have you ever been too busy driving the car to put the petrol in? Now is the time to refuel yourself. So often when you are giving out to other people and meeting their needs without taking care of your own needs, it can leave you feeling empty and exhausted with nothing left to give!



What do you do for yourself to fill your jug, so you can replenish yourself and keep things going? E.g. long baths, exercise, talk to friends.

It is important, when taking care of others, that we take care of ourselves.

When looking at how we keep ourselves strong there are 4 aspects we should pay attention to in building our resilience. List one activity that you can do this week in each area. Some activities may cover two – walking with a friend.

Physically – exercise.

Emotionally – diary.

Spiritually – study, faith, meditation, mindfulness.

Socially – connecting with others.

5-minute Stress Busters:

Make a list of activities that you can do to help you relax and fill your jug e.g.

- I like listening to music.
- I enjoy sitting down and flicking through a magazine.
- Walking round the garden always relaxes me.
- Hanging out with my friends makes me feel better.

We all need to relax and take some time for self-care.

Parenting Box

Parents are the biggest teachers of their children, the biggest role models. Children may not listen to you, but they will always be watching you.

Model self-care. Teach your children to listen to their needs and help them build their resilience as you build yours. Discuss with them all the words for feelings, ask how they feel, what they think and what they need.

Courage

Courage is not an absence of fear, it's the willingness to go forward and do what needs to be done in spite of fear.

We can develop our courage in many ways by encouraging ourselves through reflecting and listening to our own feelings, taking care of ourselves and building on those positive relationships that are important to you. Building our lives, the way we want going forward.

Our relationships and feeling connected to the people that are important to us helps us to build our own courage, it encourages us. It is often not until relationships go wrong that we begin to reflect on them. Now is the time to encourage ourselves by working on our connections.

Finish the sentence:

I feel connected to the people important to me when

It is important to reflect and work on relationships that are important to us, to water and feed them. How would you like those important relationships in your life to be going forward?

Start with where you want to go.

Imagine that you walk into an 80th birthday party and you sit at the back. People are walking to the front and talking about you – it's *your* birthday. What would you like them to say about you?

List 3 people who are important to you and think about what you would like them to say about you.

One way of looking at our relationships is in terms of deposits and withdrawals e.g.

- I spend time listening to you, that is a deposit into our relationship.
- You spend time helping me, this is seen as a withdrawal from the relationship.

In all relationships we should have a balance of deposits and withdrawals.

Make a list of some important relationship and list the deposits and withdrawals. Is there anything that needs to change or be different in this relationship?

- Important relationship –
- Deposits –
- Withdrawals –

Now you have looked at your relationships. How would you like your life to be going forward e.g. relaxed, calm?

Positive self-talk begins to focus and build on these.

Every journey starts with the first small step. After that, there are lots more first small steps!

Parenting Box

The secret to building courage in children is through encouragement. Encouragement is about noticing the effort. It is different from praise which often focuses on outcomes. Encouragement – Catch your child being good, show faith, allow your child to explore and try new things, make mistakes good as learning points. Find something to appreciate daily.

I hope you enjoyed reading ***Surviving the Storm*** and that it will help you in some small way with the storms you may have in your life.

At ***Sharing Parenting***, we offer a range of courses that you may be interested in. All the courses increase self-esteem and resilience for both parents and children and include:

- Raising Toddlers
- Dads Matter
- Raising Children
- Outside the Box
- Raising Teenagers
- Sibling Rivalry

Our courses are based on many different theories but predominantly those by Alfred Adler – An Austrian psychiatrist whose theories include:

- understanding the purpose of children’s behaviour
- the importance of encouragement
- mutual respect
- the value of empathy and resilience

Suzanne Pearson

Adler wrote:

“Have the courage to be imperfect”

“Meanings are not determined by situations, but we determine ourselves by the meanings we give to situations.”



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Sharing Parenting is a community interest company based in Newmarket, Suffolk. Working in partnership with parents, carers, schools, children’s centres, community groups and the general public sharing good quality and reliable information and support for parents and professionals.

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