

Book Review

Title: Mean Soup

Author: Betsy Everitt

Recommended for Ages: 3 years+

About: Teaching children how to deal with negative feelings.



Author Betsy Everitt tells a story about a child, Horace, having a very bad day. He comes home in a bad mood and doesn't know what to do about it. He's feeling so mean that he hisses at his mother then throws himself on the floor. His mother, recognizing that Horace needs help with his big feelings, has a solution and invites Horace to make some soup! While Horace lies on the floor, his mother puts a pot of water on the stove and proceeds to make soup. She tosses some salt over her shoulder then playfully releases her feelings into the pot. Horace becomes curious and joins his mother. Together they act out their "mean" feelings into the pot, making some mean soup.

This story can help teachers and parents discuss the challenges that surround children and the feelings children experience as a result of the difficulties they face on a daily basis. The story can be used with a group of preschoolers during circle time or with an individual child that needs the extra support in discussing and expressing their feelings. Children easily relate to the story, and can be encouraged to discuss their feelings. By having a trusted adult help children think and talk about their feelings, this can help children begin to develop an understanding of their emotions.

It is important for adults to keep in mind that young children are just learning how to label and cope with difficult emotions. This book reminds us that young children need supportive adults to help them cope with their "big" feelings. In this story, Horace and his mother scream into a pot, stick out their tongues, and breathe "dragon breath" before "stirring away a bad day" together. The very colorful and expressive pictures show how negative feelings can be expressed in a safe way with the support of a trusting adult. For example, the vibrant orange and red of the "dragon breath," and the smoke from the boiling pot show Horace expressing anger, yet the smiles and hugs from Horace and his mother show calm and happy feelings. One of the messages that are so important for children to learn is that all feelings are okay. Feelings are neither good nor bad. They just are. Each person can learn how to help their bodies feel better when they are experiencing "big" feelings.

Overall, as educators and parents, we try to help children define and acknowledge feelings and emotions through role playing, imaginative play and games, empathy and modeling, just acting silly, and lots of reading. Mean Soup does a great job in explaining to children (and reminding us as adults) that it is okay to have bad days, but *with support*, there is a way to turn the day around.

Reviewer: Alyssa McGhee, MSW
Early Childhood Consultant
Early Childhood Consultation Partnership

