

The princess and the secret

by Narinder Dhama

Once upon a time there lived a princess. Her mother was very ill, and it was the princess's fault because she wasn't good enough or clever enough. The princess tried her best, but she was very stupid.

So the princess asked the most powerful wizard in the whole land what she should do. "No one can ever find out that your mother is ill," the wizard told the princess sternly. "It has to be kept a secret, otherwise your mother will be very upset, and you'll be to blame..."

Sometimes I find bottles in funny places. Like hidden in the washing machine or behind the lloo.

I used to tell Dad, but it just made him mad at me, so now I go around the house and collect the bottles on the day the recycling lorry comes to our street. I get up early before anyone's awake to do my secret job, and I put some in other people's boxes because I don't want our neighbours to see that we have too many bottles. I do this so that no one can find out about Mum.

By the time Dad and I are ready to leave for work and school, Mum has finished one bottle of

wine and started another. Every morning she sits at the kitchen table in her dressing-gown, and sometimes she's still there when I come home again.

You must look after your mother and make her well again," the wizard explained. "How?" the princess asked eagerly. "You must make her happy," the wizard replied...

Leave me alone, Emily!" Mum yells when I ask if she's feeling OK today. "Do you understand that, or are you totally thick? Just get out of my sight – you drive me mad!"

She's always saying things like that. The other day she told me that I was the reason for her problems. I don't think she loves me.

Mum drinks a whole glass right down and pours another. Dad frowns at me. I know he's angry because I've upset Mum again. He always takes Mum's side. Dad reckons I am making Mum drink more. I must try harder.

So the princess did everything she could think of to make her mother happy.

She was quiet and well-behaved and she did her homework and she never complained. But nothing worked. The princess knew she wasn't trying hard enough,

and she felt very ashamed.

One day the Good Fairy noticed that the princess looked rather upset.

"Tell me what's wrong, princess," she said kindly. "Maybe my magic can help you..."

I have lots of friends at school, but they don't know about Mum. They wouldn't like me if they knew how useless I really am.

"Don't forget your homework," Mrs Fisher says at the end of the day. "I want your stories by Friday."

Mrs Fisher had said we could write any kind of story we liked. I'm too old for fairytales really, but I decided to write one, anyway. Terrible, scary things happen in fairytales, but everything always turns out right in the end.

"Just a moment, Emily," Mrs Fisher says as I leave the classroom with Tara and Sarbjit.

"I was wondering if you're OK," Mrs Fisher goes on quietly. "I've noticed that you're looking a bit pale and tired at the moment."

For a moment the princess thought of telling the Good Fairy all about her mother's illness. But then she remembered what the wizard had said.

"I don't need any help," the princess replied, because she knew she could make her mother well all by herself.



I tell Mrs Fisher I'm fine and escape into the playground.

My mobile rings. It's Dad, and he's been sent on urgent work business and he'll have to stay away overnight. This has never happened before, and I feel sick to my stomach.

"Don't be ridiculous, Emily!" Dad interrupts angrily when I try to tell him how I feel. "It's only for one night. And for goodness' sake, don't upset or annoy your mother – you know how you always manage to annoy her."

When I get home, I check on Mum, who's in bed. I sigh with relief because I know from experience that she won't get up now until tomorrow morning. Dad will be back early and everything will be fine.

At five-thirty the phone rings. It's Tara, asking me if I want to go to hers and watch TV. Just for an hour. I really want to go. Tara only lives in the next street. Anyway, Mum never wakes up when she's drunk so much and Dad will never know I left her for a little while. If he wants me, he'll ring my mobile, not the home phone in case Mum's asleep. I slip out. Just for an hour...

But the princess was very selfish and only thought about herself. One day she went out to visit her friend, Princess Tara, leaving her mother all alone.

But when she came back, she discovered that her mother was so fed up with the princess's selfishness and stupidity that she had run away from the palace. And now the princess's mother was nowhere to be found.

I shouldn't have gone. Mum's bed is empty and I'm flooded with guilt. Where is she?

I should have said no to Tara when she called. We only watched a stupid girlie DVD. Why didn't I say no? I run through the house, calling for Mum. She's not there, and I start crying.

I've let Mum down, and Dad too. What's he going to say when he comes home and finds Mum gone? He always said I was stupid and now I've gone and proved it.

I glance out of the window into the garden. My eyes are so blurry with tears, I think I'm seeing things for a moment. A dark shape is sitting on the patio.

The princess looked high and low for her mother. At last she found her in the palace gardens. The princess felt very, very guilty. She swore to herself that she would be a better daughter in future, and would try harder to make her mother happy.

Crying with relief, I manage to help Mum inside on to the sofa.

Then I sit by her as she sleeps, and I write about a girl who loses her pet cat.

I can't hand my fairytale in to Mrs Fisher because it gives away too much about my family. So quickly I scribble another story. Then, too frightened to go to sleep, I stay up most of the night watching over Mum.

Dad comes home the following morning and everything is back to "normal". I go to school and hand in my new story to Mrs Fisher.

Or so I think. Then I realise that, because I am tired and half-asleep, I have given Mrs Fisher my fairytale by mistake. She's asked to see me at break-time.

Maybe this is how my story's going to end:

But suddenly the princess realised that she couldn't make her mother better all by herself, whatever the wizard said. She did need the Good Fairy's help after all. So she told the Good Fairy everything and, slowly, very slowly, things began to change. It took a long, long time, and it was very difficult, but the princess understood at last that maybe she wasn't so stupid after all.

And then, eventually, they had a chance to live happily ever after.

Activities Points to discuss in class

Aims
● To understand the impact of emotional abuse on the way we feel about ourselves and behave toward others

Objectives
To enable pupils to:
● Extend their feelings vocabulary
● Recognise the links between feelings and behaviour
● Recognise that the behaviour of others can affect the way they feel about themselves
● Recognise that their own behaviour has an effect on others
● Know who they can turn to for support if they need it

Resources needed
A list of "feeling" words, a character list, space for the children to sit in a circle.

Outline of activity
1. Explain that you will be focusing on feelings and behaviours in this activity. Brain-storm different "feeling" words with the whole group. Put the words on display (you could also use a feeling dictionary – see below).
2. Ask the children to listen to the story. Discuss how the story is constructed, the difference between real and imaginary worlds. Do they think that Emily has been treated fairly? Emphasise that the situation was not Emily's fault.
3. Now divide the class into small groups and give them one of the main characters to focus on (Emily, Mum or Dad). Ask them to think about the different feelings their character is experiencing while you read the story a second time.
4. Discuss the range of feelings the story's different characters felt and how these feelings affected their behaviour towards each other.
5. Explain people's feelings will be affected by what is happening to them and how they behave towards other people. Show them an example such as the following...

Character name
Emily
What was happening to Emily?
Her mum was drinking too much.
Feeling: How did it make her feel?
Ashamed
Behaviour: What did Emily do because of the feeling?
Collects all the bottles and hides them so no one will find out

Ask the groups to write their own words under the "feeling" question. In their groups they can then discuss what was happening to Emily that led to the feeling and the resultant behaviour. Ask the groups to then offer their own answers to the "behaviour" question.
6. Ask the groups to share their answers with the whole class.
7. Ask the class the following:
● Was what was happening to Emily acceptable?
● What could mum be doing to make the situation better? Note ideas on a flipchart
● What could dad be doing to make the situation better? Note ideas on a flipchart
● What could Emily do to make the situation better for herself (note ideas on large sheet of paper)
8. The way her parents behaved in the story had a big impact on Emily's feelings.

How do the class think the changes in the behaviour of the mum and dad would have made Emily feel?
9. Looking at how the story ended, Emily accidentally told her teacher, but there are lots of other people who could help Emily. Thought-storm other people Emily could turn to (other trusted adults, ChildLine etc). Emily could also have tried talking to other people in the school – for instance, in our school we have... (circle time, peer support, school counsellors etc). Emily felt alone but there are lots of people to turn to if you need help. (Link their

suggestions in part 7. They could be used to create a display of sources of support.)

Follow-up activities
The story highlights how our behaviour can affect how other people feel and think about themselves. The children could keep a behaviour and feelings diary for a week and describe how they were treated, how this affected them, how it made them feel and their resultant behaviour. This work could be shared or kept private.

Drama activities
Have a bag of positive scenarios (people being treated with respect) and a bag of negative scenarios. Gather the children in a circle and ask for volunteers to act in the centre. The volunteers can choose a negative scenario out of the bag and act out how it makes them feel. The circle can guess how they are feeling. Ask them what they want to do about the feeling (to emphasise the relationship between feelings and behaviour). Then ask them to choose a positive scenario out of the other bag and repeat the process. Carry on with different volunteers until all the scenarios have been used.

Safety in Learning
Download or order from nspcc.org.uk/inform
A resource pack for designated child protection coordinators delivering training in safeguarding to staff working in schools or colleges. The content is relevant in all phases – from settings with nursery-age children through to further education colleges.

Feeling dictionary
This could include various words to help children who find it difficult to name feelings – for example: anxious, happy, sad, confident, ashamed, guilty, frustrated, loving, kind, angry, annoyed, joyful, excited, nervous, satisfied, proud, enthusiastic, optimistic, apprehensive, hopeful, scared, embarrassed, disappointed, inadequate, surprised. The children could make their own list and put them in alphabetical order, adding to it as they extend their vocabulary.

Special thanks to Narinder Dhama for writing the Princess and the Secret and donating her fee to the NSPCC

Resources Help for teachers and children

FOR TEACHERS
NSPCC resources... (order from nspcc.org.uk/inform)
Learning to protect: a child protection resource pack for teacher training NSPCC, 2003, £105. For tutors of primary and secondary initial teacher training courses.

Take care! Self-awareness and personal safety issues in the primary curriculum
By A Schonveld and V.Myko, NSPCC, 2000, £5. Primary resource pack

Child Protection Awareness in Education
NSPCC EduCare £27.50 plus VAT from educare.co.uk
A short course in the NSPCC's EduCare distance learning programme.

Promoting personal safety in PSHE
By Jane Hartsz, published with Paul Chapman/Lucky Duck Books, 2006, £18.99
A curriculum resource based on NSPCC work in secondary schools on safety in personal relationships, positive emotional health and wellbeing.

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Download or order from nspcc.org.uk/inform
A resource pack for designated child protection coordinators delivering training in safeguarding to staff working in schools or colleges. The content is relevant in all phases – from settings with nursery-age children through to further education colleges.



Other resources for teachers...
Teachernet: PSHE
information.nspcc.org.uk/pshe/
Information, resources and support for staff teaching PSHE to key stages 1-4 from the former Department for Education and Skills.

Curriculum online
curriculumonline.gov.uk
Multimedia resources to support teaching and learning in schools to support the curriculum taught in schools in England from foundation to key stage 4.

National curriculum Northern Ireland
New website for the Northern Ireland Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements: nicurriculum.org.uk/index.asp

National Curriculum in Wales
http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/curriculumassessment £18.99
A curriculum resource based on NSPCC work in secondary schools on safety in personal relationships, positive emotional health and wellbeing.

FOR PUPILS
In the Know, NSPCC, 20p
Magazine booklet about child abuse aimed at 8 to 11-year-olds with quizzes and cartoon strips. Download free at nspcc.org.uk/inform or order print copies on 020-7825 7422, email publications@nspcc.org.uk

MORE PUBLISHERS
Lucky Duck (luckyduck.co.uk) publishes a wide range of classroom resources on emotional health and resilience.

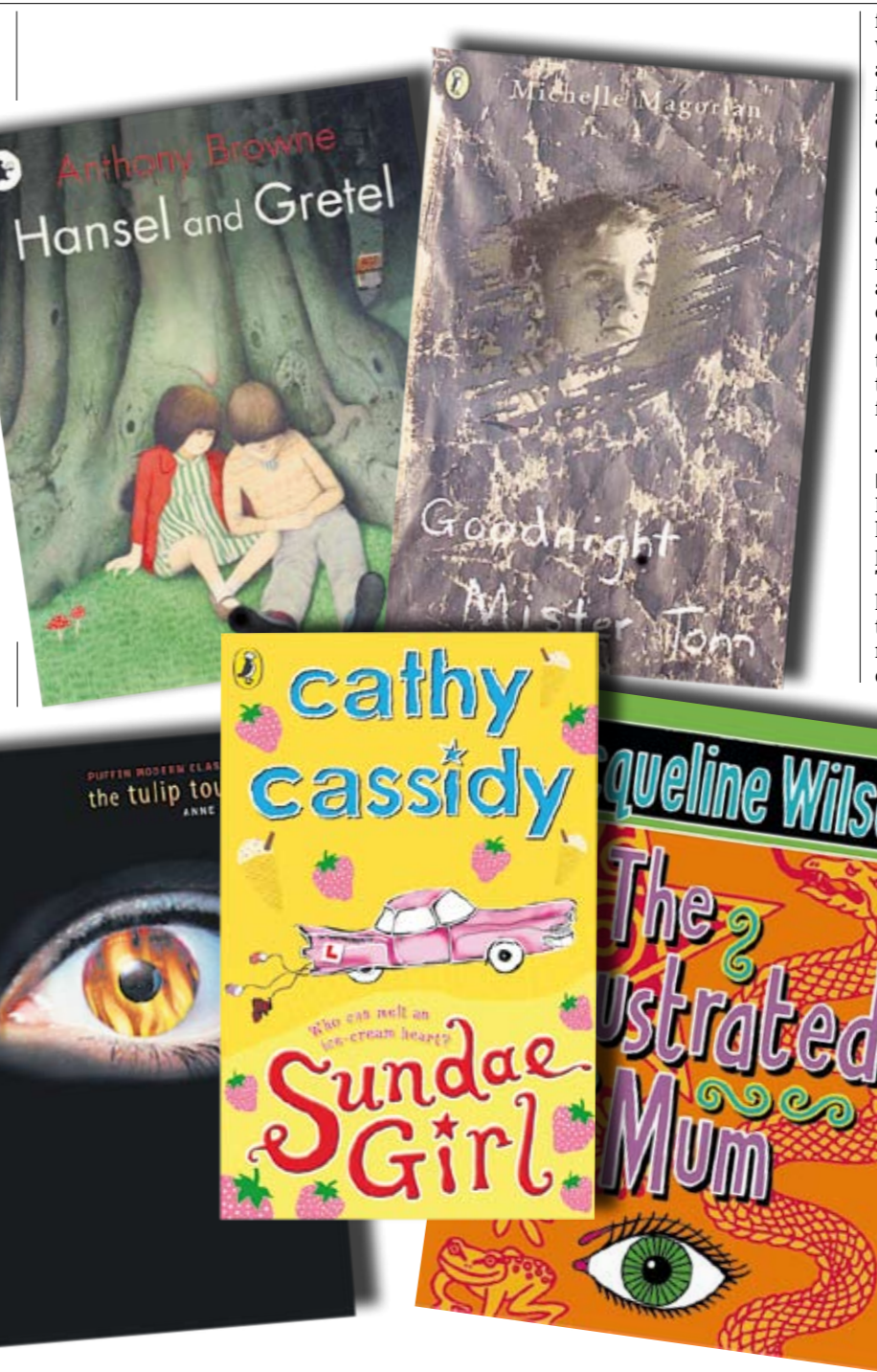
Jessica Kingsley (jessicakingsley.co.uk) Books for teachers and other professionals on topics including emotional health, self-esteem and children's rights.

Further reading Books that could help teachers raise sensitive issues

Hansel and Gretel, by Anthony Browne, Walker Books £6.99
Browne's sombre picture-book retelling of the Grimm tale, in a new paperback edition, offers a wide range of children much to look at and talk about. The claustrophobic interiors, subdued palette and theme of imprisonment within the family could appeal up to early teens. The setting was contemporary on publication in 1981 but has an air of the 1950s when Browne himself grew up.

The Illustrated Mum, by Jacqueline Wilson, Corgi £5.99
On her bad days, Marigold (an alcoholic and manic depressive) has to be parented by her daughters. For 13-year-old Star, who tries to protect her younger sister, love has become mixed up with cynicism, shame and contempt. It's left to Dolphin, the narrator, to point to her charismatic mother's good days, telling the fragile family's story through the tattoos that cover Marigold's body.
Wilson astutely makes clear that Marigold is not a scary figure to her daughters, although she leads them into scary situations: it's other adults who are scared of Marigold's "crazy" side, and the girls suffer for their fear. Unsentimental compassion makes the harrowing story palatable for young readers and means the book will be a lifeline for some.

Dizzy, Sundae Girl, by Cathy Cassidy, Puffin £5.99 each
Cathy Cassidy's novels for (mostly) girls remain light-hearted and hopeful while tackling problems related to family dynamics, friends and relationships, and convey a strong sense of how 10- to 13-year-olds talk and behave. The central characters in Dizzy and Sundae Girl are emotionally abused by their inadequate mothers. In Cassidy's



First novel, Dizzy is initially spellbound when her absent mother Storm returns and takes her travelling on the New Age festival circuit, but she is soon unhappy about the instability of her life and let down by Storm's unreliability.

In Sundae Girl, Jude's home life is dominated by her mother Rose's drinking and her grandmother's Alzheimers condition. She is weighed down with responsibilities and finds it hard to talk about her family and to accept love, even when she is hotly pursued by a charmingly eccentric boy at school. But there are bright spots in her life, thanks to her devoted grandfather, and a satisfactory resolution

The Tulip Touch, by Anne Fine, Puffin Modern Classics £5.99
Rather than focusing on the "uncontrollable" Tulip's abuse by her father, this powerful novel outlines the damage Tulip does in return (as a compulsive liar, a fire-setter and an increasingly twisted human being). Tulip's ever-more-imaginative cries for help are chartered by Natalie, the friend who becomes her rescuer, then her victim, then her betrayer.

Natalie's resentment at the adults who "make allowances" for Tulip (including her own parents) is as destructive as Tulip's rage and accelerating cruelty. This book will make 11- to 14-year-olds consider society's collective responsibility for unhappy children.

Goodnight Mr Tom, by Michelle Magorian, Puffin £5.99
This powerful classic about the evacuee experience took the unconventional view that the second world war gave some children their big break by removing them from miserable homes. Willie, sent to the country from the East End where his mother beats him, eventually finds love and security with taciturn old Tom Oakley and his dog. Geraldine Brennan

Last year 6,613 children were counselled about emotional abuse – around 1,600 boys and 5,000 girls. Many children also reported other forms of abuse.

Millie, 10, called ChildLine and said her mum and dad told her that she and her sister were not wanted. "Mum says me and my sister should never have been born. She says we ruined their lives and they never wanted us. It makes me feel really sad and most of the time I cry myself to sleep."

Robbie, 8, was crying when he called ChildLine. He said: "My mum says Santa's not coming this year 'cos I've been too naughty, but I don't know what I've done." He went on to say that he hadn't had Christmas last year either.

Darren, 13, told ChildLine: "My mum makes me do all the cooking and the cleaning and then my dad just tells me how useless I am and how everything I do is rubbish. I try my best but they always say it's not good enough. I never get any treats."

All names and identifying details have been changed to protect callers' identities

ChildLine

ChildLine is the UK's free, 24-hour helpline for children and young people to share any problem. They can also visit childline.org.uk. Children can call 0800 1111.

ChildLine is provided by the NSPCC, which recently launched a major appeal to expand its helpline services. For more information, and to donate, go to childlineappeal.org.uk. Adults with concerns about a child should call the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000 or visit www.nspcc.org.uk.

