

Guidelines and Prompts for Clinicians

How to use Ruby's Dad



Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

“

The development of this resource is very timely and exciting – Ruby's Dad is the first of its kind here in New Zealand and will be a useful tool for clinicians. This book will help us make a difference to children like Ruby.

”

RUSSELL WILLS – FORMER CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

Ruby's Dad is a children's book about a young girl whose father has a drinking problem. The creation of this book was a joint project between Health Promotion, Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora and Skylight (an NGO working with children and families who have experienced loss and grief).

Ruby's story may go some way to giving a voice to children in a similar situation to Ruby and provide a useful way for clinicians to have a conversation with either parents or children about the impact of parental alcohol use. It is available free-of-charge from Health Promotion.

These guidelines provide some thoughts, prompts and parameters to support a safe, effective conversation with adults and children to facilitate a recovery process that includes reducing harm for children. They do not provide a comprehensive, step by step guide on how to engage in a therapeutic conversation about the impact of parental drinking. Rather, we recommend those using these guidelines are skilled and experienced enough to build on the high-level ideas put forward to have an effective therapeutic conversation with their client.

Given the sensitive nature of Ruby's story, it is important that the book is distributed in settings where there is adequate support in place, eg. adult alcohol and drug services, child and adolescent mental health services, counseling or social work settings, primary care, family support agencies, specialists working in schools such as nurses or social workers. In our view, the book is not appropriate for use in classroom settings.

It is important for clinicians to assess whether *Ruby's Dad* is an appropriate resource for their client or their client's family members. It is not a silver bullet, but does provide a vehicle to have a conversation with children impacted by parental addiction or with clients who are parents.

Ways the book can be used

1. As a therapeutic tool to kick start a conversation with parents in clinical settings.

Some potential prompts to use with your client:

“Does this story bring anything up for you?” “If so, can you tell me about that?” “In what ways do you relate to Ruby?” “In what ways do you relate to her dad/or other family members?” “What do you think your son/daughter/children would make of the story?” “If you were to read it to your child/children what kind of things would you expect to come up for you?” “What do you think might come up for your child?” “What was it like for you growing up?”

2. As a therapeutic tool to support parents to read it to their child.

If you encourage this, it is important that you assess your client’s readiness to have this conversation and that there is a reasonable level of stability in the family. The safety of the child is paramount – as such you need to check out whether there are likely to be repercussions for the child or supporting partner if the book is discovered by a parent who is not ready to acknowledge he/she has a problem. It is also crucial that you coach the client so that they are well-prepared to have this conversation and to deal effectively with things that come up for both the child and for the client.

“I can see it will increase the awareness of the impact of their (parents) drinking on their children.”

QUOTE FROM CLINICIAN IN COMMUNITY-BASED ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG SERVICE

Some ways of preparing your client are:

Make sure they are familiar with the story and have had time to process their own reactions (see above).

Before giving them the book to take home ask some of the following questions, “How would you feel about reading this story to your child?” “Given that talking about how your behavior has hurt your child may be a new experience – how could you make it safe to have this conversation?” “If your child was to get angry how would you deal with that?” “If your child was to deny the impact of your drinking on him/her what would you say?” “Are there things that might stop you reading the book to your child?” “What are those things?” “What are the things that will support you to read this story to your child and to have an honest conversation about how your addiction has impacted on them?” “Are there things you have read in *Ruby’s Dad* that will help you or make it harder for you?”

3. As a tool for adult children who have a parent with problematic substance use to explore how their parent's addiction has impacted on them.

"How is Ruby's story similar to yours?" "How is Ruby's story different than yours?" "What things came up for you when you read the story?" "What are the things you would have liked to say to your parent?" (if parent now deceased) "What are the things you would like to say to your parent now?" (if your parent is alive). What is likely to happen if you did have that conversation?" "How did you deal with the drinking/other drug use?" "What is different for you now you are an adult?"

4. As a tool for clinicians who specialise in working with children to have a conversation with children 6-11 years old about their parent's problematic substance use.

"Children learn not to talk about mum or dad's drinking. It is important to create safe opportunities that will help them to articulate what is going on for them."

QUOTE FROM AN ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG CLINICIAN IN AN ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMME

Some prompts are:

"How is Ruby's situation like yours?" "How is it different?" "What has it been like for you?" "Are there things you liked about mum/dad's drinking?" "What are the things about your mum/dad's drinking you found tricky?" "Are you ok talking about this stuff?" "Mum/dad's drinking is not your fault – it is up to mum/dad to make changes" "Often families where there is drinking or other drug abuse the children learn to keep secrets – was it like that for you?" "What is going to make you feel safe talking about this stuff?" "What is your biggest concern right now?" "Sometimes when mums or dads have problems with alcohol or other drugs their children feel responsible to help them change – you are not responsible for mum or dad's addiction."

"This book is a useful tool to ask the child how is it for you?"

QUOTE FROM CHILD CLINICIAN

**5. As a tool for partners of clients
(particularly partners of clients in residential
services or family member support groups).**

For partners *Ruby's Dad* can act as an education tool (drinking/drug abuse is no longer a secret in the family) and they can be encouraged to use the book with their children. This needs to be handled carefully with partners well-primed to use the book effectively and safely (see point 2).

6. As a tool in family groups.

It is important to prepare the group on why you are using the resource. Some of the prompts above may be helpful.

“

Ruby's dad is useful for caregivers to understand what might be going on for the child... often the child's behavior is perceived as naughty and there is not a good understanding that the child is being triggered by their experience.

”

QUOTE FROM CHILD CLINICIAN

Call the **Alcohol Drug Helpline**
for confidential information,
advice and support.

0800 787 797

(Seven days a week 10am – 10pm)

Additional copies of *Ruby's Dad*
can be ordered at
resources.alcohol.org.nz



Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora