



Marlon and the Scary Something is a funny and heartwarming tale about anxiety, courage and understanding. When Marlon stumbles upon a strange creature (a dog named Kukka), he freezes with fear. Having never encountered a dog before, Marlon runs away home, scared. Imagining the worst, his anxiety grows until it starts to take over his life, making him afraid to even go outside. When he finds the courage to tell Momma Cat about his worries, she offers him some coping skills to help him calm his fears so he can decide what to do about the dog. Having found a way to overcome his fears, he takes a chance on friendship – and it works! *Marlon and the Scary Something* offers life lessons about courage, self-reliance, and solving problems, as well as coping skills for dealing with anxiety and fear.

Below you'll find brief descriptions of the different life lessons and coping skills contained in the story. Each description includes several questions teachers, parents and other adults can use to initiate further discussions.

Building Self-Reliance

In the beginning of the book, when Marlon sees the Scary Something, he is flooded with fear and can't use his brain in a helpful way. Before he encountered the Scary Something, Marlon often used cat logic and reasoning to pursue his goals. Cat logic is a way to think about a problem and arrive at a potential solution. But this time, his fear has made it impossible. Instead, he's on a Creature-Feature-Merry-Go-Round of anxiety and worry. With the help of Momma Cat, he's able to calm his anxiety and finally use his cat logic to decide what to do next. As children hear his thoughts and watch him in action, they can learn how to use logic and reasoning to help them solve problems.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does Marlon decide what the Scary Something is and if it's dangerous?
2. How do Marlon's fears affect him?
3. How was Marlon able to calm his anxiety?
4. How did Marlon decide to reach out to Kukka and try to make friends?
5. Can a cat and dog ever be friends?
6. What is cat logic and how does it work?



Courage and Self-Reliance

As Marlon learns more about anxiety and himself, we see him start to use coping skills. His first big decision is that he doesn't like being scared. And his next is that he wants to do something about it. It took courage for Marlon to ask Momma Cat for help. And once he understood that he can use his own resources to help himself, he summoned his courage to go out and face the unknown. But this time, he knows he can depend on his own skills and abilities to take care of himself.

Questions for Discussion

1. As Marlon tries to decide about being an inside cat or going outside, how does he think about it? What does he decide? Why?
2. What made Marlon decide to try to make friends with the dog?
3. How does Marlon use cat logic to understand his situation and make his plans?
4. What are plans and why would you make a plan?
5. Do plans always work? If you had a plan that didn't work, what would you do next?

Gaining a Friend

When Marlon first sees Kukka, he's frightened by her behavior. He fears the worst and runs away. Kukka is equally puzzled by Marlon's behavior. She tried to use dog behavior to invite Marlon to play. But, instead, she scared him. Marlon has to overcome his fear of the unknown to risk making friends. Kukka knows she is bigger than Marlon and is extra careful to show him that he can trust her. Once they find common ground, it becomes easier to find a path to friendship. The story helps children understand that friendship blossoms when you respect the other person. And while that person may be different from you, there are many things you can do and enjoy together.

Questions for Discussion

1. In the story, Kukka invites Marlon to play but Marlon gets scared instead. He doesn't know if Kukka is friendly. But at the end of the story, he decides to make friends. What made him change his mind?
2. Marlon is puzzled by Kukka's behavior and Kukka is puzzled by Marlon's behavior. Why? How do they find a way to communicate with each other.
3. Is it hard or easy for different animals or different people to be friends? What makes it hard or easy?
4. Think about one of your friends. What do you like about that person? And what do they like about you?



Dealing with Anxiety

There are a number of coping skills for anxiety. Mama Cat teaches Marlon two that help him gain control of his runaway emotions. One is slow breathing, and the other is to challenge his anxiety with questions. The slow breathing helps Marlon calm down, but it doesn't really address Marlon's underlying fear of the Scary Something. After all, it could be dangerous or not and Marlon's anxiety assumes it is. When Momma Cat teaches Marlon to ask his fear questions, he begins to realize that the Scary Something did not threaten him or act dangerously. Once he understands that the Scary Something was not a threat, Marlon was able to put aside his fear, change his behavior and reach out to make friends.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why was Marlon afraid of the Scary Something? How did Marlon react to it?
2. Have you ever felt scared? How does your body feel when that happens?
3. If Marlon felt safe hiding under the couch, why did he leave it?
4. What does it mean to ask your fear questions? How does it help?
5. When Marlon realized the Scary Something was a dog, did that make him feel better? Why?
6. Have you ever been scared? What scared you and how did it make you feel to be scared? What did you do? Does it still make you scared now? Why?

Momma Cat Tip:

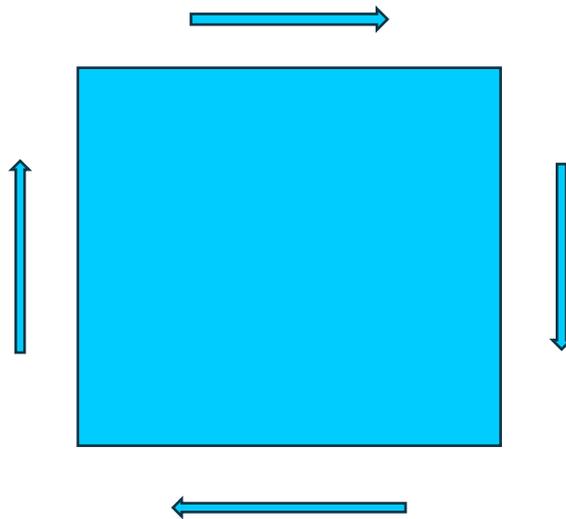
Being able to identify what you are feeling is the first step to managing your emotions, thoughts, and behavior.





Another Way to Help Calm Anxious Feelings

When you feel fearful or anxious, *Box Breathing* is another coping skill that can help you calm your mind and quiet your feelings. Here's how to do it: in your mind, think of a box. Take each step (below) and as you count to four, let your mind slowly move around the sides of a box. Then do it again with steps two through four. When you finish, start over again. Take your time as you do it. (If a count of four is too difficult, then try doing a count of three)



Step 1:

Breathe in as you count to four

Step 2:

Hold your breath as you count to four

Step 3:

Breathe out as you count to four

Step 4:

Hold your breath as you count to four

Repeat