

## Cassie the upside down koala

Cassie  
the  
upside  
down  
koala



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illustrations by Mina Shafer

*Cassie the upside down koala* is a story about difference: *Cassie* chooses to be different but she is mocked by her family for being different. *Cassie* sticks to her guns, however, and in the end *Cassie* helps her family to come together and learn to value her differences. Whilst the story is told in the context of the koala family, it is evocative of similar group dynamics in peer and school settings.

### How to use the book

The best way to think of *Cassie* is as a way of starting a conversation with your child. There are no fixed rules or set instructions, but a few tips are provided below.

The most important thing is that you and your child enjoy the shared experience of reading together and having fun.

The book can facilitate a discussion about feelings and experiences. Ask your child:

- “have you ever felt like *Cassie* or someone else in her family?”
- “has there ever been a time where something like this happened to you?”

This can help your child to link feelings and experiences, and to find words to describe the narrative of their life.

*Cassie* can be used to explore and celebrate individuality.

Read the book to remind yourself to celebrate difference between members of your family, and to give your children the message that being different is okay.

Use *Cassie* to acknowledge the creative activities and solutions that children have to offer.

This book creates the space to think together. Talk to your child and say:

- “let’s think about how you are different”;
- “let’s think about a time when you felt like *Cassie*, and when you felt like one of the other family members”.

Each child will take something different from the story, and for this reason, it’s better not to be too prescriptive about your conversations.

Ask open-ended questions, such as those we’ve provided on this resource. Let your child lead the discussion and you follow, so that your child feels free to express her or his feelings completely.

*Therapeutic storytelling is an easy means of addressing difficult topics with children. Proven and effective sound psychological theory is quietly woven into the storyline. The hard work of trying to determine how to address a specific topic has been done for you. Caring adults, in essence, then have a professional helping them quietly work through difficult topics with children. It provides a springboard for discussion and guidance, allowing for positive change that affects self-esteem, trust development, value clarification and decision-making. The power of the story, with its ability to allow fantasy, creativity, feelings, thought and change continues as a natural focal experience in a child’s development. Coupled with quiet psychological theory it offers a healing medium that allows children the ability to learn, feel and know through the assistance of their imagination.*

- Caryn Sabes Hacker “*The Healing Power of Storybook Solutions*”

*Cassie can be used to explore and celebrate individuality.*

*Good Ships* is an initiative of Relationships Australia Victoria to produce a series of engaging, beautifully illustrated story-books for children, with accompanying resources for parents, teachers and counsellors. The books can be read simply for pleasure, but each is also focused on a challenge or difficulty children commonly face. The idea behind the series is a simple one: stories help us connect, grow, learn, and heal. For more information visit [www.rav.org.au/goodships](http://www.rav.org.au/goodships)



### Different stories within *Cassie*

There is usually more than one story in a story. Here are some ways of thinking about the different conversations you might have about the different stories in *Cassie*. These are ideas only. We're not suggesting you ask every question or that you go through them in order. You could pick a couple out and see where they take you, allowing the conversation to go where your child takes it. Allow the conversation to go only as long as the child has energy and interest in it.

### The "What Happened" Story

This concept helps to check:

- a child's understanding of the story
- how much a child was engaged by the story
- what the child took from the story.

It helps you to share the experience of the story.

#### Questions

- Is this a good book?
- What was your favourite part?
- In the beginning, did *Cassie's* family make fun of her or think she was wonderful?
- Why did they make fun of her?
- Did they make fun of her at the end?
- Why do you think *Cassie's* family changed?
- What was that eagle doing?
- When the eagle swooped down, why didn't it catch any of the koalas?

### The "Identity" Story

This story allows different themes to be explored, such as:

- being different
- belonging
- being mocked or bullied
- staying true to yourself
- being helpful
- finding creative solutions
- saving the day
- experiences of peer and sibling groups
- tolerating differences in others
- experiences of family
- experiences of peer groups.

#### Questions

- Do you think *Cassie* was clever or silly?
- Were all the koalas the same or were they different from each other?
- Is it good to be different or be the same?
- What's hard about being the same?
- What's hard about being different?
- Do you think *Cassie* was a hero? Why?
- Have you ever been a hero?
- Have you ever been clever?
- Think about how you are different.
- How do you think I'm different, or your brother/sister is different?
- Is it good to be part of a family?
- Why/why not?
- If you saw someone making fun of someone else, what would you do?

### The "Feelings" Story

This story allows different themes to be explored, such as:

- identifying and understanding feelings
- empathy
- managing feelings
- coping
- sharing experiences.

#### Questions

- After reading *Cassie*, do you feel happy or sad or something else?
- Why do you feel happy/sad/other feeling?
- When her family made fun of her how do you think *Cassie* felt?
- Has anyone ever made fun of you?
- How did that make you feel?
- What did you do? What did you tell yourself?
- Have you ever made fun of someone?
- How do you think they felt?
- When you feel bad, what do you do?

### Ways of responding

- Listen to and reflect back your child's thoughts and feelings.
- Congratulate and appreciate your child's contributions.
- Validate and support any solutions your child suggests.
- Reflect and acknowledge your child's feelings.