

## Teachers' resource

## Zoe's Choice

*Zoe's Choice* is a story about dealing with conflict in relationships, and coping with and overcoming fears and worries. With the help of her family, Zoe discovers her own strengths and learns to overcome her fears.

*Zoe's Choice* supports the Victorian Curriculum Building Resilience Social and Emotional Learning Materials (SEL) in providing opportunities to develop social skills while engaging with the key areas of emotional literacy, decision-making, problem solving, positive self-regard, stress management, positive coping, help-seeking and peer support.

### Exploring personal and social skills

In the classroom, *Zoe's Choice* can be used in the following ways.

- To explore conflict in relationships; in particular, being frightened, saying no to violence, safety rules, family support and coping skills.
- To explore inner strength, resilience, the value of imagination and friendship.
- To explore a child's view of their relationships with their family, such as how they can support and help each other in times of trouble and how they can manage problems such as fear and violence.
- As a visual tool to assist children to find the words to describe their experiences and fears in a non-threatening way.

- To explore how to manage peer relationships using Zoe as an example. Zoe holds a solid position on safety in relationships and shows forgiveness when amends are made.
- To discuss ways of managing fears, difficult friendships and strengths.
- To explore a child's capacity to cope with fears, conflict in relationships, seek support and learn creative ways of developing healthy relationships.
- To inspire children to write or draw. *Zoe's Choice* could be used as a prompt for journaling, for example, to share a time of triumph over fear, of being strong and resilient.
- To encourage thinking, reflection, clarity, pride, and storytelling.

The story can be used as a basis for a series of activities, such as making up a story or drawing pictures.

Follow-up activities could include asking open-ended questions, retelling the story, acting out roles, using puppets, writing reactions, and/or using various art materials to help a child explore themes and feelings triggered by the story.

*Zoe's Choice* can be used as a way of exploring inner strength, resilience, the value of imagination and friendship. The story can help a child explore their capacity to cope with fears, conflict in relationships, seek support and learn creative ways of developing healthy relationships.

Good Ships is an initiative of Relationships Australia Victoria to produce books and resources for children to help address the difficulties they commonly face in the context of important relationships. For more information visit [www.rav.org.au/goodships](http://www.rav.org.au/goodships)



*Narrative has to do with the fundamental preoccupations of education – with words, representations, ideas, forms, structures, quantities, qualities, and judgments. It is, among other things, an exercise in critical thinking.*

*Our narratives are means through which we imagine ourselves into the persons we become.*

– Richard L. Hopkins  
*Narrative Schooling, Experiential Learning and the Transformation of American Education* (1994)

#### Important note

If you become aware of domestic/family violence or abuse in the child's life, make a report to the appropriate authorities.



## The "what happened" story

This concept helps check a class' understanding of the story, how much they were engaged by it, what they took from it and gives students the opportunity to share the experience of the story.

### Questions

- Is this a good book?
- What was your favourite bit?
- What happened to Zoe and Lena at the beginning of the story?
- Why was Zoe frightened?
- What did Zoe's family do to help her?
- Do you think Zoe's family were helpful?
- Did Zoe change at the end?
- Why do you think she changed?
- What was Scarolena doing?
- Why did Zoe and Scarolena dance together at the end?
- What happened to Zoe and Lena at the end? What changed?

## The "feelings" story

Themes that can be explored include identifying, understanding and managing feelings, empathy, coping and sharing experience

### Questions

- After reading *Zoe's Choice*, do you feel happy, sad, scared or something else? Why do you feel that way?
- When Lena pushed Zoe, how do you think Zoe felt?
- Has anyone ever pushed you? How did that make you feel?
- Can you draw a picture of what your worry or fear looks like?

- What did you do? What did you tell yourself? Who helped? How did they help?
- Have you ever pushed anyone? How do you think they felt? How did you feel?
- Do you find Scarolena scary?
- How do you manage feeling bad or angry?
- Can you pick a picture where Zoe felt sad/good/bad/scared/strong/frightened? What is different about the pictures?
- If you were going to tell a story about your fears what would you call it?
- Themes or therapeutic goals that can be explored include being pushed, being scared, seeking help, ways of coping, finding creative solutions, making friends, being assertive, saying no to violence.

## Exploring identity and relationships

Themes that can be explored include being pushed, being scared, seeking help, ways of coping, finding creative solutions, making friends, being assertive and saying no to violence.

### Questions

- Do you think Zoe was weak or strong? Why?
- Was Lena weak or strong?
- Were the family members helpful to Zoe?
- What are good ways of helping a scared child?
- Is it good to get the help of family members? Why or why not?
- Tell me about a time when you were frightened and got help to solve the problem.

- Tell me about a time you learned something from a friend or family member.
- Explore a time when you felt like Zoe or one of the other family members.
- If you saw someone being pushed, what would you do?

### Ways of responding

- Reflect on the way each child responds.
- Ensure that discussions around bullying are appropriately linked to any whole of school approaches, policies and procedures.

### Activities

1. Write, draw or make a play about how Zoe helped a child who is pushed by a friend in the park.
2. Draw a line, with "free will" (or "doing what you want") on one end, and 'rules' on the other. Ask students:
  - Where do you stand on this line?
  - Where do you want to stand?
  - When do we need to have more rules?
  - When do we need to do what we want?

## Fostering creative solutions

### Activities

1. Draw or write about an everyday fear you have experienced and the ways you have coped with or found solutions to the problem.
2. Come up with a group solution to fighting between friends, real or imaginary.

## Teachers' resource

### Exploring friendship

#### Questions

- What happened between Zoe and Lena in the story?
- How did it make each of them feel?
- How can friends' actions and words help or hurt us?
- Was Zoe a good friend to Lena and Scarolena?

#### Activities

1. Our friends' actions and words can both help and hurt us. In groups, organise the following words and phrases on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being "very helpful" and 10 being "very hurtful": share, invite to play, listen to, play fair, ignore, push, make fun of, say hi, say bad words or yell, be bossy.
2. In groups, role play Lena and Zoe solving an argument.

#### Ways of responding

- Congratulate each child for their creativity and strength.
- Ask where and how they learned to be strong and creative.
- Take a "no-to-violence" position and help children develop assertive ways of forming safe relationships.
- Let children know that not all problems have solutions but we can all develop ways of coping, such as asking for help.

### Developing awareness of coping skills and resilience

#### Questions

- Look at Zoe's strengths and share an experience of coping with fear or conflict by seeking help or being strong and resilient.

- How do you cope with anger/sadness/fear?

#### Ways of responding

- Reflect on the ways the child responded.
- Congratulate the child for their creativity and strength.
- Ask where and how they learned to be strong and creative.
- If the child says they have not been able to cope with fears or conflict, ask who they know that has coped with fears or conflict in real life or in a movie or book.
- Congratulate and celebrate the child awareness of resilience.
- If the child says they have not been able to cope with fears or conflict, ask who they know that has triumphed over a fear in real life, in a movie or book. Celebrate the child's awareness of resilience.
- If the child is not aware of a person coping with fear or conflict, tell a story of a child coping with fear or being pushed. Let them know that not all problems have solutions but we can all develop ways of coping, like asking for help.

### Exploring strengths

Zoe's strengths, found at the back of the book, can be used to celebrate strengths and ways of coping with problems and relationships.

These images could form the basis for exercises to be enjoyed in the classroom, at home or in therapy.

#### Questions to ask and exercises

- Which images show how you feel now?
- Which images show your strengths?
- Choose an image that you like and tell a story about it and you.
- Choose an image that celebrates something about your friend, sibling or parent.
- Choose a random image. What does it mean to you? Who does it remind you of? Does it bring up a memory of a particular time or event?
- Choose an image that is about something that you have never experienced.

#### Ways of responding

- Listen, look and reflect on the thoughts and feelings of the child.
- Congratulate and appreciate each child's contributions.
- Don't judge or teach, just celebrate the child's contributions.
- If you are worried about a child, discuss it with another teacher, coordinator and/or a counsellor and encourage the school to support the child.

*The aim of Relationships Australia Victoria's Good Ships project is to produce a series of engaging, beautifully illustrated story-books, with accompanying resources for parents, teachers and counsellors. The books can be read simply for pleasure, but each is 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.*

