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Kimochis® Help Us to Try New Things

For Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Children with autism spectrum disorder can become very anxious, scared and uncomfortable when asked to try something new or do an activity that is unfamiliar or out of the regular routine. Wearing a new pair of pajamas to bed or taking a different route to school may seem simple to you, but to your child even small changes can create high levels of anxiety and stress. This rigidity can interfere with academic success, social relationships and emotional wellness. It can also have a significant impact on you and your family members as you try to adapt to your child's discomfort and opposition to trying new things. Going back to the same place every year for vacation may be great for your child with autism, but everyone else in the family might want a new experience!

The Kimochis® character Bug is a caterpillar who is afraid of change. Because Bug struggles with being brave and trying new things, he can be a great teacher.

Introduce Bug to Your Child

Read Bug's story from the *Kimochis® Feel Guide*—included in the Bug character box. If your child can read, he/she might want to read it to you. Have fun talking about where Bug lives and his favorite things. Talk about the description of Bug's personality in the second paragraph. Describe how Bug is scared to try new things, especially flying! Explain to your child, "Because Bug feels afraid, he is going to help you practice being brave and trying new things that might be hard or scary."

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Bug's Brave Flight

This activity will help your child to understand that being brave is "getting yourself to try something new that is hard or scary."

Materials: Bug; Brave and Happy Feelings; Feelings from Mixed Pack # 1: Scared and Shy

- Tuck the Scared and Brave Feelings into Bug's pouch. Tuck Bug's wings in his back pockets. Ask your child to pull out the Scared Feeling. Say, "Bug is feeling very scared to try to fly. Why do you think Bug is scared?"
- Share a story of a time that you were scared to try something new. Start with, "One time, I felt scared when…" Show your child the facial expression and body language you might have when you are scared. If it is comfortable for your child, look into a mirror together to make scared faces and bodies.
    - "I felt scared when I (name the time). Look at my scared face. Let's make a scared face together. Look at my scared hands and body. Let's make those together. Let's make a scared sound."
- Tuck the Scared Feeling back into Bug's pouch and ask your child to pull it out. Ask if he/she can think of a time he/she felt scared, using the same prompt, "I felt scared when …" If your child can't think of a time, give a reminder, "I remember when you…" Practice making scared faces and bodies again. If other family members are available, involve them and use the prompts above.
- Tuck the Scared Feeling in Bug's pouch with his wings tucked in his back pocket. Ask your child to pull the feeling out as you show his tucked wings. Say, "Bug feels scared to fly, but he really wants to learn. We're going to help him learn to fly! Let's take turns and help Bug say words that will help him be brave."
- Show the Brave Feeling and ask your child to tuck it into Bug's pouch. Say positive self-talk statements to help Bug try to fly (choose one of these or make up your own):
    - "I can do this"
    - "Be brave."
    - "I've done hard things before."
- Pass Bug to your child and prompt him/her to say a positive self-talk statement. As your child says the words, prompt him/her to pull out a little bit of Bug's wing. Take turns saying positive statements and pulling Bug's wings out gradually. Involve other family members.
- When his wings are out say, "Bug wants everyone to help him fly. He feels so brave. His wings are out and he is ready!" Pass Bug back and forth to make it look like he is flying.
- When Bug is finished flying, place him on the floor or table with the Scared, Brave and Happy Feelings. Thank your child for helping Bug be brave so he could fly. Ask your child:
    - "What did Bug feel before he tried to fly?" (Scared)
    - "What did Bug say so he wasn't scared and tried to fly?" (Repeat some positive self-talk statements and show the Brave feeling)
    - "How does Bug feel now?" (Happy)
- Tuck the Brave Feeling in Bug's pouch. Pull it out and share your own story. "One time, I felt scared to (name an experience), but I was brave and I got myself to (describe what you

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- did)." Show your child what your face and body looked like when you tried the new experience. Use the mirror to help your child imitate your brave face and body. If other family members are available, involve them too. Tell your child about a positive self-talk statement you might have used to help you be brave and try the hard or scary thing.
- Tuck the Brave Feeling back into Bug's pouch and ask your child to pull it out. Ask your child to think of a time he/she felt scared, but was brave and tried. Prompt with, "I felt brave when…" If your child is unable to think of a time, give an example of when you observed him/her being brave. Practice making brave faces and bodies together with the mirror. Ask, "Did you say something positive that helped you feel brave?"
- Tell your child that when we are brave, we "get yourselves to do something that is hard or scary."
- If your child is shy when meeting new people, do the activity above with the Shy Feeling and talk about how we need to be brave when new people are introduced. Rather than a self-talk statement, think of an appropriate script your child could say, such as, "It's nice to meet you." Practice with Bug and prompt your child in situations with new people.

Prompt and Reinforce Your Child's Bravery

- Reenact Bug's Brave Flight several times with your child so it feels familiar to him/her. If your child needs to try something new, allow him/her to hold Bug. Or, place Bug in a special spot to "watch" your child as he makes an effort to try something new. Bug can then "report" on how brave your child was!
- Give your child the Brave Feeling to hold while trying a new activity or task. Remind him that when Bug was brave and tried to fly, he discovered that flying was fun.
- Use Bug to remind your child of positive self-talk statements. "I can do it." "Be brave." "I've done hard things before." If your child can read, write his/her favorite self-talk statement on a small 3x5" card. This can be placed in his/her room or in his/her notebook. He/she can look at the card right before a new task or activity. If your child cannot read, take a photo of Bug "flying" that your child can look at as a positive reminder. If your child takes the card to school, explain to the teacher how your child is using it as a way to try new things.
- You can also use the template at the back of this handout as a reminder to your child to be brave when trying new things. Ask if your child would like to color it and hang it in a prominent place in the house for all family members to use as a reminder.
- If possible and appropriate, let Bug accompany your child during new experiences. For example, if your child needs to go to a new doctor's office, Bug can go too with his Brave feeling tucked in his pouch!
- Prepare your child before a change or new activity. If your child is a reader, write out steps together. For example, if you are going to a new park for a play date, consider the following steps:

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1. Find the park on a map—your child can help you!
2. Drive by the park several times before the day of the play date—bring Bug!
3. Stop the car and look at what is there, but don't get out of car.
4. Ask your child to draw a simple picture or take a few photos of the park. (Bug might be sitting on the picnic table or bench for the photo!)
5. Look at the picture or photos when you are at home. Put them in a prominent place and share them with Bug. Bring the photos when you go to the park for the play date if you can't bring Bug.

- Use similar steps for other new activities. Involve your child in planning the experience as much as possible. Point out how, just like Bug, your child can practice being brave when trying new things.
- When your child is able to do a new task or experience, give lots of positive acknowledgement. Be sure it is immediate and specific. Say what you see! For example, "Johnny, you were very brave to try that big slide. I saw that you really liked it!"
- Try to relate new experiences to similar ones that are familiar. This allows your child to build on existing knowledge. For example, if you are going to a new park, let him know that this park is almost the same as his favorite one. Also point out how it might be different (for example, this park does not have swings).

Write a Kimochis® Social Narrative

Social narratives are simple stories that you write with your child about challenging situations. These stories can direct your child on what to do; encourage emotional regulation; and promote an increased understanding of the perspectives of others. The narrative acts as a reminder of what Bug taught. In this case, your child needs to remember to be brave and use his/her positive self-talk to help him/her through scary or hard things. Here are two examples:

Trying New Things (For younger children)

Sometimes I have to try new things that are hard or scary. Bug taught me to be brave and try new things just like when he learned to fly. Bug taught me to say words, like (write the self-talk words that worked best for your child) to help me try. My teacher and (mom / dad / caregiver) like it when I try new things. Even though it might be hard, I will try to do new things.

Trying New Things (For older children)

Throughout my life, there will be new experiences and situations I will need to try. Trying new things will help me to grow as a person. If I try new things, I might have the chance to meet some interesting people or learn exciting, new information. Sometimes, I get nervous or scared about trying new things. Lots of people can feel scared when they try new things. I will try to remember how Bug taught me to be brave. I will use my self-talk to help myself when I get nervous or scared about new things. I can say, (write the self-talk words that worked best for your child). Everyone will be happy and will feel proud when they see me trying new things.

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Tips for writing a Kimochis® Social Narrative

- If possible, involve your child in writing the social narrative.
- Write the story in first-person and present tense.
- Begin with a sentence that explains the challenging situation. Using the word "sometimes" or "once in a while" will help your child to understand that difficult situations don't happen all the time.
- Throughout the story, include sentences that explain the situation—what your child sees, what happens, who is involved.
- Include a sentence that describes the feelings and thoughts of others as a way to help your child learn perspective-taking.
- Write a sentence or two describing what to do during the challenging situation.
- Use the example narratives here as a guide, but make sure you individualize it for your child's age, developmental level, situation and experiences.

Read the social narrative several days (and numerous times) before the new experience. This will help your child become familiar with the parts of the narrative. Review the story immediately before the event or experience so the steps are fresh in your child's mind. While reading the story, you can role-play each step with your child. During the event or experience, coach and prompt your child to use the positive behaviors suggested in the story, "Remember how Bug said his self-talk words." Verbally reinforce your child when he changes his behavior. If you would like, you can also pair the story with drawings, pictures or photos (of your child doing the desired behaviors). Having Bug close by when you read the story together may help your child remember what to do.

I Used to Be Scared Game

- Gather the whole family together. Have one family member start by finishing the sentence, "I used to be scared of…"
- The next family member repeats what was just said and adds what he/she used to be scared of. Keep adding to the list! For example, "Mom used to be scared of thunder. Dad used to be scared to swim. I used to be scared to go to sleep with the lights out."
- Young children may need help. Give them the prompt, "What was Mom scared of? What was Dad scared of?" Keep playing the game until the list of old fears is too long to remember! This is a playful way to reinforce the concept that everyone gets scared and that fears can come and go.

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Read *Bug Makes a Splash!*

In *Bug Makes a Splash* Bug is afraid to try something new—swimming. When Lovey Dove® gently encourages him, Bug is able to be brave, overcome his fear and jump in.

Sit in a comfortable spot with your child and read the book aloud. An older child who reads may still enjoy having it read aloud by you or might prefer to read the book to you. Let your child choose. As you move through the book, stop to ask open-ended questions, such as the ones suggested below. These questions are designed to encourage your child to think beyond the text as a way to relate to the characters' experiences. Point out the facial expressions and body language of the Kimochis® characters in the illustrations. Talk about the words the characters use when talking to each other. Follow the guidelines below to make reading Bug's book a fun and positive learning experience.

Before reading the book:

- Ask your child about the title, *Bug Makes a Splash.* "What could it mean? What kind of a splash can Bug make?"
- "What do you think Huggtopus® (the octopus) is thinking in the cover illustration?"

While reading the book:

- On the page where Bug is afraid to swim say, "Look at Bug's face and body. How do we know that he is afraid? Why is he afraid to swim? Why do you think he dreams of flying? Have you ever felt like Bug?"
- On the pages where Bug has on his goggles ask, "Why did he put on his goggles if he wasn't going swimming? Why did he curl up into a tight ball?"
- On the page where Huggtopus® throws Bug up in the air ask, "How do you think Bug feels? What did Lovey Dove® mean when she said, 'It's okay to be afraid. Only then can you be brave.'"
- On the page where Bug is falling into the cold, wet water ask, "What was Bug saying to himself?" (Name a positive self-talk statement.) Ask your child for an example. If he/she is unable to give one, suggest several, such as "I can do it!" "I've done hard things before." "Flying will be fun!"
- On the page where Bug lands softly on the side of the pool ask, "Why did Bug feel proud? How does Bug make a splash?"
- Keep Bug nearby and use him as a puppet as you read. Tuck his wings in. Put the Scared Feeling in his pouch in the beginning. Put the Brave Feeling in his pouch as he flies and pull out his wings.
- If your child wants to ask questions while you read, that's great! Stop to talk about them.

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After reading the book:

- Pull out the Scared, Brave and Happy Feelings and go through the book to find examples of when the Kimochis® characters felt those emotions. Encourage your child to look at facial expressions and body language as well as words.
- Tell a story of a time you were afraid to try something new and how you got yourself to be brave like Bug. Ask, "When have you felt like scared like Bug to try something new?" If your child is unable to think of a time, give an example. Talk about the experience and Bug's bravery.
- Draw a picture of yourself when you tried something new. Encourage our child to draw a picture of something he/she was brave enough to try or is afraid to try.
- Read the book again and again. Ask different questions and have fun!

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I can do it!
Be brave.
I've done hard things before.

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