

# Go Away Ick!

## Parent/Provider Guide

Congratulations on making this book part of your collection. Whether you received this book as a gift, or purchased one for yourself, I hope you find it to be a useful tool in someone's mental health journey.

Children often don't have the words to explain how they are feeling or it's difficult for them to figure out where feelings come from. It's hard for them to identify what triggers their feelings or emotions. Providing a resource where the child can relate to a character is a good first step in starting the conversation.

### Interpretation of the Story

The story features two main characters: Katie and the Ick. The term Ick means something that is unpleasant or offensive and can be understood by children of any age. In the beginning of the story, the Ick is an external purple shadow that creeps up on the main character and follows her wherever she goes. It appears whether she is in a place that is usually associated as being fun, like a pool with other kids or playing soccer with a friend or sitting quiet in her own personal space. It can appear at any time of day, in any place, without discrimination.

What does the Ick represent in the story? It serves as a symbol for indescribable feelings that are hard to communicate. By deliberately leaving the term "Ick" undefined, the story allows each reader to interpret it uniquely. It is visually represented by a purple "shadow", which moves throughout the story from outside of the body to inside of the body and finally as a glow around the body.

On **page 1**, Katie describes how the Ick makes her feel sick. It creates a definite physical reaction in her body. Unlike a typical illness that can be remedied with medicine, the symptoms of the Ick are often challenging to explain. It might present as a stomachache, tight chest, sweating or increased heart rate. The impact of the Ick isn't confined to the mind alone; it's noticeably felt in the body.

**Pages 2-10** depict various scenarios where the Ick can manifest, offering a glimpse of its potential occurrences. Since the Ick doesn't discriminate based on time of day, location, or activity, it can "show up" virtually anywhere. These pages are a great opportunity to ask questions like "why do you think Katie feels uncomfortable at school, or with a friend, or playing. Point out details such as Katie having a smile on her face, however, the Ick is still present. We often mask our feelings, so they are not externally obvious.

On **pages 11-12**, Katie begins to recognize the presence of the Ick. Her facial expressions convey frustration as she starts to perceive the Ick as its own entity as illustrated by its physical form standing in front of her rather than lurking as a mere shadow behind her. This is the moment she begins to recognize its occurrence and realizes she plays an active role in how much power it is given.

The influence of the Ick makes her feel emotional, as shown on **pages 13-14**, where emotions are tied to feelings. Sometimes it provokes anger, as seen on **page 4**, leading her to feel the urge to lash out. When someone feels hurt internally, they can feel compelled to inflict pain on others, not always through physical means but also through words. Other times, it evokes feelings of sadness, shyness, or a desire to cry. In the bedroom scene on **page 3**, Katie appears despondent as she sits alone on her bed clutching a stuffed animal. On **page 6** she seems withdrawn, unwilling to engage with children playing in the pool. Ask your child why they think Katie feels that way? By asking a general question on any page, they might reveal potential scenarios happening to them in a similar environment or situation.

On **page 8**, she stands alone at her locker, as tears stream down her face covered by her hand. Crying is a common way for children to express hurt or sadness, particularly when they struggle to find words to explain their emotions. Questions such as “do you ever feel like crying at school (or insert place)?” would be appropriate here or “do you have any friends that cry at school?”.

On **page 15**, Katie peers behind her body to catch sight of the Ick, sensing its presence. This is the beginning of her taking control over the Ick. **Page 16** illustrates her contemplation as she ponders what might be causing these feelings and attempts to rationalize its existence. This awareness is powerful because it illustrates her ability to think through reasons why it might be visiting her, ultimately leading to strategies for helping it go away. **Pages 17-22** further explore the countless situations in which the Ick can occur, demonstrating its potential to appear at any time and in any place, be it at school or at home, with friends or when alone.

On **pages 21-22**, the purple shadow of the Ick begins to shift within Katie’s body in the illustrations. This marks the realization for the character that the Ick isn’t confined to a physical space or location but resides within her. While in future contexts beyond this book, the Ick will be identified as “anxiety”, at this stage of awareness, there is no diagnosis attached to it; the character simply acknowledges its existence.

On **page 23**, the illustration presents the Ick as a distinct character, separate from merely being a “shadow” that trails Katie. Although depicted as imposing, intimidating and frightening, Katie decides to confront the Ick on **page 24**, and takes the initiative to demand that it leaves. This is when the power shifts from the Ick having control to Katie actively taking control.

The pivotal moment in the story unfolds on **pages 25-26** when Katie confides in a friend about the Ick. Her friend acknowledges experiencing similar visits from the Ick, symbolized by the purple image in her stomach. This illustrates that others can relate to our struggles, fostering a sense of solidarity. While individual triggers for the Ick may vary, its emotional impact can be universal. As the friends discuss their experiences, the Ick seems to go away, as illustrated on **page 26** where the purple shadow appears to be floating outside of their bodies. These images depict the purple Ick transitioning from within their bodies to outside, symbolizing the relief that can come from discussing feelings. This realization is empowering.

In the beginning of the story, Katie feels powerless against the Ick. However, by **pages 27-28**, she undergoes a transformation from being controlled to taking control. Asserting, *“When my Ick shows up, I help it understand that even when it visits me, I am in command!”* marks the moment she recognizes her agency over the Ick. We feel better when we know that there are things within our control to tame the Ick, called coping mechanisms, to provide a sense of relief and empowerment.

On **page 29**, the character comes to the realization that the Ick, synonymous with anxiety/depression/mental health issues, may be a permanent facet of her identity. Some individuals contend with situational anxiety, while others struggle with generalized anxiety. By openly discussing our experiences as they arise, it helps us gain resilience against future occurrences, gradually diminishing their impact. The glow around Katie’s body and heart represents healing and calm.

The illustration on **page 30** conveys a sense of forward-looking optimism, symbolizing the dawn of a new day and the potential for hope, particularly in contexts where feelings of despair might surface. **Although today might be a hard day, tomorrow doesn’t have to be.** The intention here is to show that the feelings we have right now won’t last forever and that tomorrow is a fresh start.

## How to Use this Book as an Interactive Tool

When the guide is removed from the back pocket of the book, the pocket becomes a safe place for children to leave notes about their Ick for you to discover. If you purchased a book online and downloaded the guide, instead of a pocket, children can write notes on the journal page located in the back of the book, or use lined, sticky notes to “stick their Ick” on the back page or you can create an Ick box for them to place notes for you. Either way, it becomes another great way to communicate.

## Inspiration for the Story

The inspiration for this story stems from my daughter Katie’s early struggles with mental health, which surfaced when she was just 8 years old. During elementary school, instances of harassment and intimidation went unreported initially, as she kept her struggles private. Drawing from my own upbringing alongside a mother who battled anxiety and depression, I was aware of the signs and engaged Katie in conversations until she felt comfortable sharing her experiences.

## Intention for the Book

I hope that this book can be a tool to inspire communication and healing for someone you care about.

*Dawn*

SCAN ME



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