



How to Experience  
and Use  
*Taming Your Tormenta*  
with Children

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# How to Experience and Use Taming Your Tormenta with Children

I suggest that you read *Taming Your Tormenta* first before you read the book with children. Know if you have experienced a loss, this book may bring up feelings that may need attention. This book is meant to be an experience with children, so if they have any questions or need support, you will be available to help. It is okay to share your feelings and coping strategies for grief and loss to give children a real-life example and model how to manage emotions. If you are a volunteer, teacher, or therapist teaching belly breathing or mindfulness activities, you can also use these guidelines when reading this story.

Although the hurricane has passed, windy days and howling winds trigger some people's memories of Hurricane María and its aftermath. Become aware of what triggers your extreme emotions like guilt, shame, fear, contempt, disgust, anger, sadness, surprise, anxiety, confusion, envy, horror, nostalgia, or embarrassment. Awareness helps you understand your mood so you can develop a plan for calming and coping. Having a routine of healthy self-care habits allows your body, mind, and spirit to heal. It is common to feel afraid during and after a traumatic event. This fight-flight-freeze response is a normal reaction meant to protect a person from harm. Your emotions are not a character flaw but a natural instinctive state of mind in response to a traumatic event.

Bessel Van Kolk, M.D., states, "Trauma is neither a disease nor a disorder, but rather an injury caused by fright, helplessness, and loss. Trauma that results in injuries can be transformed and healed by attending to the natural healing powers that reside deep within every human being."

## HOW TO EXPERIENCE AND USE TAMING YOUR TORMENTA

A year and a half after Hurricane María, my friend, Greg, was still very bothered by the howling wind. One day while visiting his brother, the wind began to howl, and things began to rattle. Greg put his hands over his face and said, "I just can't take the sound of the howling wind." His brother reminded him that in the present moment, he was safe. His brother suggested to think of the wind differently and to tell himself, "I love the wind, I love the wind." Now, Greg says to himself, "I love the wind. I love the sound of the wind." He also reminds himself he survived the last hurricane, and he will know what to do in the future to continue to keep his family safe and mentally healthy. On a recent windy day, he realized he was not reacting or feeling anxious, and that he felt safe.

Self-care, belly breathing, meditation, and mindfulness activities help calm and reset that flight-flight-freeze response. I tell you this story to remind you it is essential to pay attention to self-talk, or what we say to ourselves for our robust mental health. Greg's story is an example of how you can share your feelings with someone you trust, become aware of what triggers your extreme emotions, and have a willingness to change your thoughts..

An elderly lady told me that reading *Domando Tu Tormenta* helped her grieve some of her losses. She dealt solely with practical issues the first year after Hurricane María, things like putting her life and household back together, and only doing what had to be done. A year and a half after the storm, she was surprised to acknowledge how consumed she was with a deep sense of sadness. Realizing she had to move forward in the grieving process, she would read a small portion of the book, put it down, cry, and then go back to it later. This is an example of how she permitted herself to experience her feelings of loss slowly over time.

Grieving is a process that can take time - weeks, months, years. The intensity of your emotions will diminish and pass over time; they are just part of a normal cycle of recovery. Everyone grieves differently when they have experienced a significant loss in their life. You may experience some, all, or none of the emotions of denial, anger, sadness, depression, helplessness, guilt, or a sense of relief. You may experience other feelings, as well.

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Recognize what might be considered a small disaster for adults, like the loss of a favorite toy, may be experienced as a significant loss by a child. One five-year-old boy, Michael, felt sad because his goldfish died after the hurricane. His family helped him bury his fish in a box in their back yard. The burial, ensuing conversation, and acknowledgment of his loss were opportunities to discuss how death is part of the human life cycle, and this ceremony served to support his experience. A support system, self-care, traditions, or rituals allow you to heal over time.

I was supposed to be on the island during Hurricane María, but instead, I was in Massachusetts caring for my terminally ill daughter, Ericka. She was suddenly diagnosed in September 2017 with ovarian cancer and died six weeks later, October 15, 2017. As I knew I could not save or protect my daughter, I decided to focus my energy on loving her and helping others. Taking action allowed me to shake off the traumatic power of feeling hopeless about all the loss occurring around me. In February 2018, I began presenting meditation stress-reducing workshops, helping the children of Puerto Rico. *Taming Your Tormenta* was the result of attending to my grief as well as emotions of anger and sadness. The book is dedicated to Ericka, and one of her poems is at the beginning of the book.

Although this story centers on Hurricane María that devastated Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017, the lessons are relevant to anyone who has ever experienced a hurricane or any natural disaster.

### CHAPTER 1 THE TORMENTA ARRIVES

If you are a parent, you can read with your child and use the first chapter to have a conversation about how your child feels about Hurricane María now that some time has passed. Sometimes just listening and allowing them to express how they feel is enough. Sometimes your children might not want to talk about it, or they might not be ready. That is okay, too; let them feel comfortable sharing or not. Or, your children may still have fears; they might need reassurance and a reminder that in this present moment, they are safe, and their feelings are normal.

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Sometimes prayer or reliance on family values or spiritual practices is enough; it depends on the child and the family. Chapter one acknowledges the historical event of Puerto Rican people surviving Hurricane María. I want to convey a message of hope and survival in spite of the devastation, as well as a reminder recovery happens over time and occurs one day at a time. I have included several images from nature to encourage children to visualize as a symbol of recovery and growth.

### CHAPTER 2: AURIANNA'S STORY: BE PREPARED

Chapter two illustrates when bad things happen, children will be okay if parents can remain calm. The family in this chapter prepared as best they could. After the hurricane, their focus was to survive, keep a routine, maintain their faith, and help others. The lesson is our children are always listening to what we are saying and observing what we do. Even though children may be young, they can be of service and help others. Allowing and encouraging your child to help others is a compelling role to build their self-esteem.

### CHAPTER 3 BUILDING SELF-CARE LIFE SKILLS

Chapter three is about self-care, (eating healthy, sleeping, exercising) and practicing mindfulness exercises to calm and soothe yourself. Using a glitter bottle and belly breathing are examples of mindfulness exercises, as are using your thoughts to calm yourself, as well as using questions to recognize when you are safe and when you are not.

You may notice multiple photos of a blue tarp being used in my workshops throughout this chapter. For those never having experienced a hurricane, a blue tarp is what FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) issues to homeowners to protect their home if it was damaged during the hurricane and needs repair. The use of the blue tarp in all of my workshops is a symbol to honor the strength and resilience of Puerto Rico and to encourage children to be proud even if they have a blue -tarp roof.

### CHAPTER 4: PELUSA'S STORY: ASK FOR HELP

Chapter four uses the story of Pelusa, my dog, to learn to ask for and accept help, as well as a reminder to recognize when you are safe. The story in the chapter about the popping balloons and Pelusa becoming afraid and then jumping into a student's lap actually occurred in the classroom in Cidra.

It was a teachable moment. I stopped the workshop to tell the students Pelusa was giving them an example of what to do when you are afraid, and that is: asking for help.

### CHAPTER 5 RAYNE'S STORY: LIFE'S PROBLEMS – A PUZZLE TO SOLVE

Chapter five demonstrates parents are not perfect, and the best we can do is learn from our mistakes and be truthful about life events. It acknowledges a parent cannot always protect their children from harm and life events. This fact is a part of life; we are human. Be kind to yourself. One of our jobs as parents is to nurture and teach our children and use the definition of resilience (capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness) to help our children grow and develop.

Here's how to use the notion of resilience with your children:

- Look at problems like a puzzle to solve.
- Identify what you can control and what you cannot control.
- Ask for help from people that will be on your team and support you.
- Make a plan and be willing to change the plan if needed.

The guidelines outlined in this book are not a substitution for therapy. The messages in this book are life skills that can benefit both children and adults. While there are many mindfulness exercises in this book, I have introduced only two, belly breathing and how to make a glitter bottle. I chose these because these mindfulness exercises are simple to make and easy to do. Children always have their breath and imagination with them.

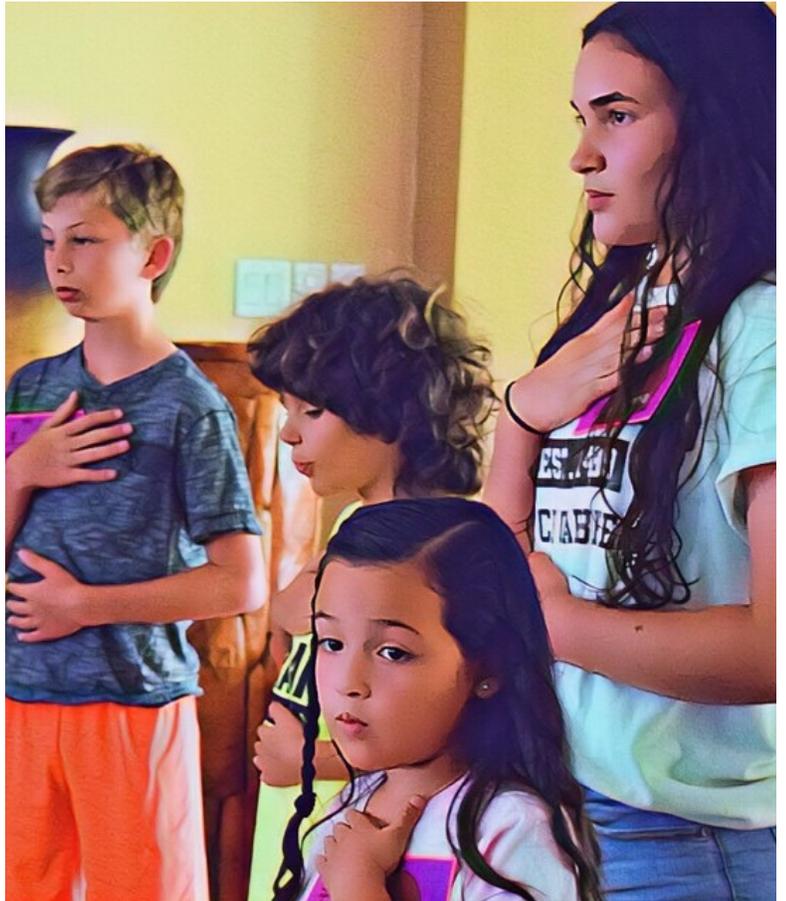
# Mindfulness Activity: Belly Breathing

Parents, children, and adolescents can learn and practice mindfulness as part of daily life to improve and support mental health, self-care, and well-being. The goal is to teach simple, practical skills to help individuals cope with life pressures they face in their lives.

People benefit from mindfulness exercises, breathing exercises, relaxing techniques, guided imagery, and other methods to help to regulate their emotions.

One long-term goal is for children to be introduced consistently to mindfulness at a young age and use the skills throughout their school years into adulthood. These methods provide children and adolescents the opportunity to develop life skills to thrive, be resilient, and master the challenges of today's modern world.

Children and adult's good health improves behaviorally over time, using daily life mindfulness activities through the use of play, imagery, gratitude, journaling, connecting with nature, community service, and team building. Repetition of mindfulness activities sets the foundation to develop healthy habits and coping techniques for life. This belly breathing exercise is one activity you can do together and experience with your child.



## HOW TO DO BELLY BREATHING

Parents, children, and adolescents can learn and practice mindfulness as part of daily life to improve and support mental health, self-care, and wellbeing. The goal is to teach simple, practical skills to help individuals cope with life pressures they face in their lives.

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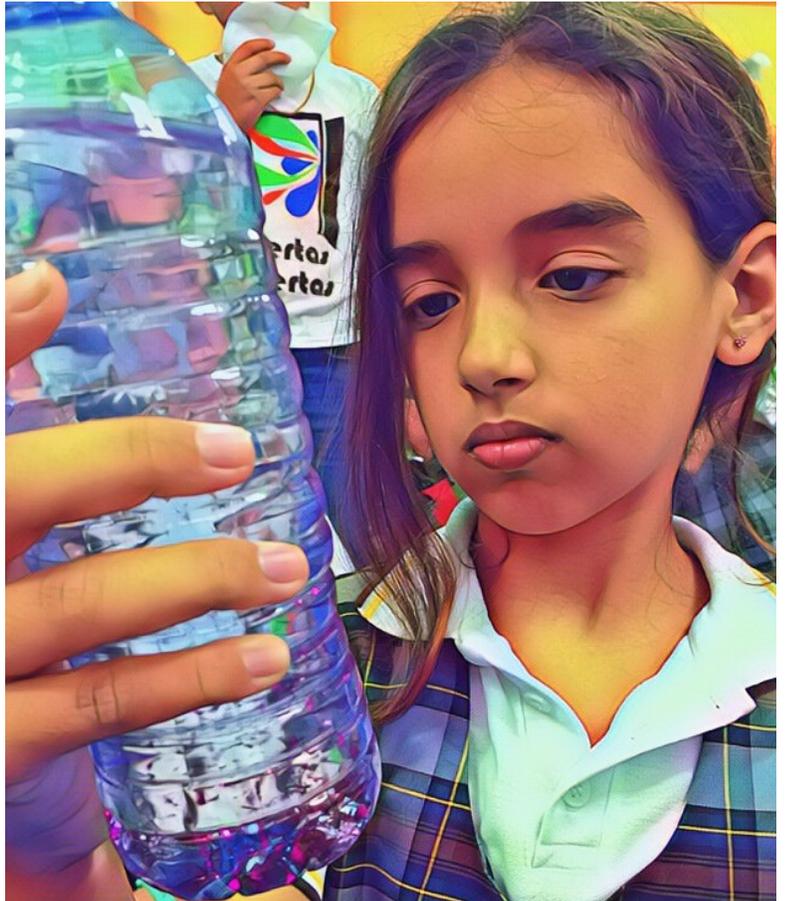
Belly breathing is easy to do and can be relaxing. Try this basic exercise and make it a daily habit. Use this exercise any time you need to relax, take a break, or relieve stress.

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
2. Put one hand on your belly over your belly button and the other hand over your heart or chest.
3. Take a deep breath in through your nose and let your breath fill your belly like a balloon.
4. Breathe out through your pursed lips (like fish lips) as if you were blowing out candles or blowing bubbles.
5. Do this breathing 3 to 10 times. Take your time with each breath.
6. Notice how you feel at the end of the exercise.

# Mindfulness Activity: Make a Glitter Bottle

Try this basic activity and use a glitter bottle any time you need to relax, take a break or relieve stress.

Having busy thoughts in our mind is normal. Children and adults benefit from mindfulness exercises, breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, guided imagery, and other methods to help regulate their mood. A glitter bottle can be used to calm your thoughts and feelings. The swirling glitter is like a windy storm in our mind when things become busy. It happens when we are distracted, worried, angry, or stressed out. Your thoughts and feelings are like the swirling glitter when you feel overwhelmed or think too much.



A glitter bottle is simple to make. You can use a plastic water bottle. Remove the wrapping. Pour a little glitter into the bottle of water. Put superglue inside of the cap. Seal tightly.

Shake your bottle to see the glitter fly around. Watch the glitter swirl and slowly float to the bottom of the bottle. Keep watching the glitter. Breathe slowly as you watch. When you practice mindfulness belly breathing and focus on positive thoughts while watching the glitter, it allows your mind to relax and calm down.

# About Jacque Marling de Cuéllar



Jacque Marling de Cuéllar is a licensed therapist, board-certified clinical Ericksonian hypnotherapist and life coach for over 30 years. Previously she practiced at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and continues to maintain her own private practice. Her mission and purpose are to help others who suffer from trauma, anxiety, depression, cancer and brain injury. She works with her clients to create a sense of hope that life can be different and specializes in working with individuals teaching wellness and self-care to create a life they love.

Jacque is a breast cancer survivor. For those who suffer from cancer and chronic illness, Jacque utilizes a multi-disciplinary approach such as hypnosis, meditation, progressive relaxation to help you to create a quality of life. She offers one-on-one coaching, workshops and customized programs for clients seeking to create the life they desire.

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"You've given us wonderful techniques and we are learning day-by day to control what is in our power to do so."

- 2018-19 5th Grade Class, Luis Moñoz Iglesias, Cidra, Puerto Rico