

OC FAMILY

A man with a shaved head and a black polo shirt is carrying a young girl with dark hair on his shoulders. They are outdoors, with a beach and ocean in the background. The man has a pained but happy expression, while the girl is smiling and resting her hands on his head.

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KID health

BY CAITLIN ADAMS

The power of the mind Unlock the healing abilities of imagination.

Let's face it: Growing up is tough. Kids know what it's like to feel stressed, both at home and at school, and statistics show that pressures on kids are increasing at younger ages. They have also become more sensitive at "picking up" adults' stress, such as tension related to the current economic downturn.

Dr. Charlotte Reznick, author of "The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform Stress and Anxiety into Joy and Success" (imageryforkids.com/book), understands this. Reznick is a licensed child educational psychologist with a practice in Los Angeles and an associate clinical professor of psychology at UCLA. She wrote the book to address the pressures kids frequently face.

Due to academic struggles, stress associated with trying to "fit in," questions about self-image and identity, and possible issues related to bullying – a concern that has recently led to tragic consequences – growing up is far from idyllic for anyone. And some parents have difficulty identifying stress in their child but wonder why their little one suffers from chronic stomachaches.

So how can a child cope, with so much still to learn about the world around him and his place in it? The ideal solution may be rooted in another childhood trademark: imagination.

"So much comes from children's imagination," says Reznick. "Everything comes from imaginations – all our thoughts, the pictures we create."

She has developed a therapeutic method that incorporates diaphragmatic breathing, guided imagery and artistic



expression that allows kids to visualize and identify their feelings to find out what it takes to make them feel better.

An 8-year-old boy says his anger is red-hot, and it's in his belly. To make it go away, he breathes in his "calm blue feelings," which are visualized in his shoulders. A 7-year-old girl says her magic wizard friend gave her a gift of three crystals – a heart, a star and a diamond – to help her build social confidence.

The idea behind her practice, Dr. Reznick says, is finding tools that will allow kids to develop their intuition and access their own wisdom.

"Even though we don't think about kids as wise, they have innate wisdom in addition to what they pick up from family and

friends," says Reznick. "So, they often know the right thing to do."

A large part of helping kids in these situations is getting them to calm down to a point where they're more capable of introspection.

"I would teach them to slow down, to check inside with what feels right," Reznick says. "And not only check with their mind, but also their heart and gut."

With practice, she says, imagination skills can be adapted to practically every situation, allowing kids to lower their stress levels, perform better in school and build confidence.

"Sometimes you can't change the situation, but you *can* change how you react to it," says Reznick. ■