

Module 4: Packing Your Mental Health Bag

Teaching Aid: Story #1, 10 year old, Katelyn*

** This story is based on fictitious people and situations. Any resemblance to a child's real life situation is unintended.*

10-year-old Katelyn lives with her mother and her younger brother, Andrew, age 6. Sometimes she argues with her mother about procrastinating in doing her chores, cleaning her room, and doing her homework, but she also likes to go places with her mother and can talk to her about things she is worried about. Katelyn has a best friend, Amanda, since 1st grade, who lives just two blocks away and goes to the same school. She has a dog, Bear, and takes responsibility for feeding him and walking him every day. Katelyn likes school and her teachers, and she looks forward to going to school to see her friends. She loves Reading Class, but she doesn't like Math because it is hard. Sometimes Katelyn worries about doing well in school and getting her homework done, or being liked by her friends. On most days, she likes herself, and doesn't think too much about her worries.

Ask the Class: What do you think, does Katelyn sound like she is coping okay? What do you think are Katelyn's resources for coping?

One day Katelyn comes home from school and her mother tells her they will have to move because they can't afford to stay in their house anymore. Her mother lost her job, and for a while until they get back on their feet, they will need to move in with their Grandma. Katelyn's grandma lives on the other side of town in an apartment, which means that Katelyn will be changing schools, and will not be able to see her friend Amanda except sometimes on the weekends. Then her mother says, "Katelyn, there's something else, too. Grandma's apartment does not allow pets, so we have to think what we can do with Bear. And, while I'm trying to find a new job, I need you to help Grandma watch Andrew after school."

Ask the Class: Now what has happened to Katelyn? What are her new stressors?

Katelyn starts her new school, and her new teacher is nice. She realizes that her new class is farther ahead in the Math book, and she feels lost. The girls in her class have been friends for a long time, and they don't invite her to sit with them at lunch. They seem to be having lots of fun together, and don't offer to include her. She kind of hangs out by herself at recess. At Grandma's house, there is only one extra bedroom so she shares a room with her mother and Andrew sleeps in the living room. Her mother is very worried about money, and she spends most of her time looking for a new job. She is cranky when she gets home, and Katelyn tries to help Grandma so her mother can rest. She misses Bear, who is living with a cousin in the country, for now. Katelyn has started having stomachaches in the morning before school, and she often wants to stay home. She feels shy in class and is afraid to speak up when called on. Sometimes she asks to see the nurse and go home early. After school she has to watch her brother, and when she has time for herself, she feels so sad she can't concentrate on her homework. Sometimes she cries herself to sleep.

Ask the Class: How is Katelyn coping with her new stressors? Has she moved up or down in her mental health? What could Katelyn do to build her mental health resources for coping with stress?