



The Little Elf who missed his Birthday Party

A therapeutic story to support primary-age children in exploring strong emotions linked to the coronavirus pandemic.

Guidance for Adults about this Story (you will find the story on p1)

- Therapeutic stories are designed to help children to explore and understand feelings. Based on narrative psychology, this taps into storytelling as a therapeutic tool. This story is not about problem solving or finding answers, it is about understanding the emotional connection we have with the story and the characters. We have written this story to help children to explore the feelings they may be having and witnessing during the coronavirus situation. It's important to let your child lead the discussion about the story and let them make any links themselves to their own thoughts, feelings or situations. Children might also make links to many different situations outside of coronavirus, and that is ok.
- The main psychological messages in this story are:
 - o *Resilience and Hope* - Some people might be feeling isolated, helpless and scared at the moment. We can't change the situation, but we might be able to change how we feel, think and act about the situation.
 - o *Sense of Belonging* – This situation is happening to everyone, in different ways, all around the world and there are ways we can still feel connected.
 - o *Feelings* - It's ok to talk about the feelings you are having, and these are normal feelings in an abnormal situation. Different people are having different feelings, at different intensities and at different times, and that is ok.
- Read the story first yourself before you share with your child and notice your own reaction to the story. Your child will probably need to hear/read the story several times to help them to process the content. It is important to read the story with your child if you want to discuss it and ask questions. However, your child might like to read it themselves beforehand and that is ok.

- After reading the story, you might want to talk with your child about the story. Asking questions and discussing the story, will help your child to understand and process feelings. If you are asking questions, try to ask open-ended questions and let your child lead. Try not to ask leading questions e.g. 'Does this make you feel sad?' Instead try to stay in the metaphor of the story and allow your child to make the links between the characters and situations/feelings in their own lives e.g. 'How do you think the Little Elf was feeling?'
- If your child shows an interest in this story (and they might not, that is ok), here are some questions that you might want to ask/discuss:
 - o Is there any character or part of the story you would like to draw a picture of together? (Sometimes children want to draw/talk about the character/part of the story that they identify most with.)
 - o Is there any character or part of the story you would like to talk about?
 - o How do you think the Little Elf was feeling before he met the woodpecker?
 - o How do you think the Little Elf was feeling at the end of the story?
 - o How do you think Grandfather Elf was feeling?
 - o How do you think the other elves in the trees were feeling?
 - o What do you think the elves did while they had to stay in their trees? How did they keep in touch with their friends?
 - o What ideas do you have about what might happen next in the story?

Further Reading

Brett, D (1992) More Annie Stories: Therapeutic Storytelling Techniques. New York: Imagination Press.

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The Little Elf sat outside his tree, drinking some juice and watching the other elves playing in the forest. He was feeling excited because tomorrow was his birthday and he was going to have a big party, outside with all of his friends. He had been promised his favourite chocolate cake with chocolate buttons and candles. His tummy felt all fluttery with excitement at the thought of opening presents with his friends.

Suddenly, the sky became dark and a huge, dark mouldy green something floated down close to the trees, blocking out the sunshine. All of the elves came out of their trees to look. Some elves started talking loudly and shouting, “What is it? Why has everything gone dark?” The Little Elf looked at the faces of the Big Elves and saw that they looked worried and frightened. Their foreheads frowned and their mouths were clasped up tense and rigid. This made him feel frightened too. He was confused. The Big Elves were not frightened of anything. What was this huge, dark, mouldy-green something that frightened the Big Elves?



The Grandfather Elf came out of his tree and spoke loudly to all of the other elves. “There is something strange happening. A huge, dark, mouldy-green something is blocking the sun and we have never seen this before. Everyone should stay inside their trees until we know what is happening. No elves should be outside playing or even going to school!”

The Little Elf watched as all the other elves ran inside their trees. He felt sad because he wanted to play with his friends after lunch. He hoped the huge, dark, mouldy-green something would be gone by tomorrow, in time for his birthday party. He went inside his tree too and he waited and waited. But the huge, dark, mouldy-green something did not move. He watched as some elves came out of their trees to check but the Grandfather Elf spoke to them from his tree “Stay inside your trees. It is not safe to go outside.”

All night the Little Elf waited and waited, and in the morning, he looked outside to see if the huge, dark, mouldy-green something was gone. But it was still there! He felt sad, dropped his head and began to cry. How could he have his birthday party today if nobody was allowed to go outside? He felt a little bit angry too. What was this stupid huge, dark, mouldy-green something and why was it trying to ruin his birthday party? This was not fair! He felt very stiff and started to cry big, angry tears.

As the Little Elf sat at the entrance to his tree crying, he heard someone tapping on the tree trunk. He looked up and saw a large colourful woodpecker with red feathers and a bright yellow chest.



“Hello,” said the woodpecker. “Why are you crying Little Elf?”

“There’s a huge, dark, mouldy-green something in the sky,” sobbed the Little Elf. “And we don’t know what it is. We can’t go outside until it goes away.”

“Well,” said the woodpecker. “That huge, dark, mouldy-green something is a cloud.”

“What? A cloud? But why is it green?” asked the Little Elf.

“It’s a new kind of cloud,” said the Woodpecker who was very wise. “But it is still a cloud. Clouds always pass but we have to wait for a wind to blow them away. And there is nothing we can do to make the wind blow sooner, we just have to wait. When the cloud passes, some things will be the same and some things will be different. Because this is a new kind of cloud, we don’t know how long it will stay or what might fall from it. Best to stay inside to stay safe, just in case. But when the cloud passes, the sun will come out again.”

The Little Elf began to think. He thought about other clouds and storms he had seen. He remembered times he had stayed inside his tree during a rainstorm to stay warm and dry. He felt a little better knowing that the huge, dark, mouldy-green something was just a cloud. Then he started to feel lonely. How long would he have to stay inside his tree and when would he see his friends again? Who would sing happy birthday to him today? He started to cry again.

“What’s wrong Little Elf?” asked the Woodpecker.

“I feel so lonely,” cried the Little Elf. “Today is my birthday and if I have to stay inside, who will sing happy birthday to me? What if I can’t see my friends for a long time? What if they are scared of the huge, dark, mouldy-green cloud too?”

“Well,” said the Woodpecker. “What did you do last time there was a storm and you felt lonely inside your tree?”

Suddenly, the Little Elf remembered a time when he was inside during a storm and he missed his friends. He had climbed high into his tree and was able to see his friend’s tree across the forest. But he didn’t feel brave enough today to climb up into his tree. He felt tired and sad. He told the Woodpecker who smiled at him. “You were brave before, you can be brave again Little Elf.”

So, the Little Elf took a deep breath, looked up and began to climb up the trunk of his tree. The Woodpecker flew beside him and told him, “Well Done, Keep Going!” The leaves of the tree kept the Little Elf safe from the huge, dark, mouldy-green cloud. When he got to the top of the tree, he took another deep breath and shouted loudly.

“Hello Elves. The huge, dark, mouldy-green something is just a cloud. We have seen clouds before and we just need to stay inside our houses, safe and warm. We have to wait until the wind blows for the cloud to pass. But we have waited for clouds to pass before and we can do it again!”

The Little Elf watched as slowly, the other elves started to appear in the branches of their trees. They smiled and waved at the Little Elf. Even the Big Elves looked happier. “Thank you, Little Elf,” called one Big Elf. “I feel better knowing it is a cloud and that we are all waiting together. You are so thoughtful to tell us what you figured out.”

Soon, all the elves in the forest were smiling and waving from their tree branches. The Little Elf felt happy to see them all, even though he could not play with them. Then, Grandfather Elf started to sing, “Happy Birthday to you...Happy Birthday to you...”

One by one the elves joined in until the forest was full of the sound of elves singing.

“Happy Birthday dear Little Elf...Happy Birthday to youuuuuuuuuuu.”

The Little Elf smiled at the Woodpecker and at all the elves. He started to think that maybe this was not such a bad birthday after all. He also started to plan a celebration for the elves for when the huge, dark, mouldy-green cloud was gone. He would ask for a big chocolate cake to share with everyone.



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