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news CONNECTION

The Worry Monster

By: Steven Wilson, Ed.D.

A behavioral health services specialist at Best Point Behavioral Health by The Children's Home has instituted bibliotherapy to provide care for her clients while staying in compliance with social-distancing requirements due to COVID-19.

Bibliotherapy is a treatment in the mental and behavioral health community that uses literature, pictures and storytelling to augment other forms of therapy.

"Bibliotherapy guides children through an imaginative journey to gain an understanding of emotions," said Jennifer Zavadil-Ryan, behavioral health services therapist and licensed social worker with The Children's Home. "It offers healing and aids in children being able to express their own emotions directly or through the characters in the story."

The tool Zavadil-Ryan is using is one she calls "The Worry Monster."

"The idea behind the Worry Monster is that children have a lot of worries and often do not have the words to express them," she said. "With the Worry Monster, I teach the concept of containment and a way of let-



Behavioral Health Services Therapist Jennifer Zavadil-Ryan said one of her clients has already placed a few "worries" in his monster. One worry was about a particularly scary dream he had; but, he was going to let his monster hold on to it for a little while so he didn't have to think about the scary dream so much.

ting our worries go or a way to set worries aside rather than ruminating on them."

Zavadil-Ryan said when talking with one of her clients, she chooses a story that fits the specific needs of the child. Then she shows the child the worry monster she made and encourages him or her to make their own worry monster in time for their next session.

"When they have worries, they can draw or write their worries on paper and let the Worry Monster 'eat' their worries and fears away by putting them



Behavioral Health Services Therapist Jennifer Zavadil-Ryan shows some of the everyday materials anyone can use to make their own Worry Monster. Some items that are easily converted into Worry Monsters are empty coffee cans, construction paper, markers and a rectangle shaped box.

in the monster they made," she said. "The monster helps them understand that even if they cannot extinguish the worry permanently, by drawing or writing it, and placing it in the monster, the monster can hold onto that worry for them."

"Bibliotherapy is a great way to bridge the communication gap that's a very common challenge in treating younger clients," said Debbie Gingrich, vice president of behavioral health at The Children's Home. "Young minds can often illustrate their feelings with role play, pictures and story-telling when they are trying to communicate with adults. Jennifer's 'Worry Monsters' are a great tool and especially useful when we're treating clients through different vehicles like telehealth."

Zavadil-Ryan said her Worry Monsters are especially useful when treating clients via a distance treatment model. One of her young clients was coloring a "Feelings Monster" that went along with a story Zavadil-Ryan was reading during a treatment session. The monster and the coloring activity helped the child stay focused during

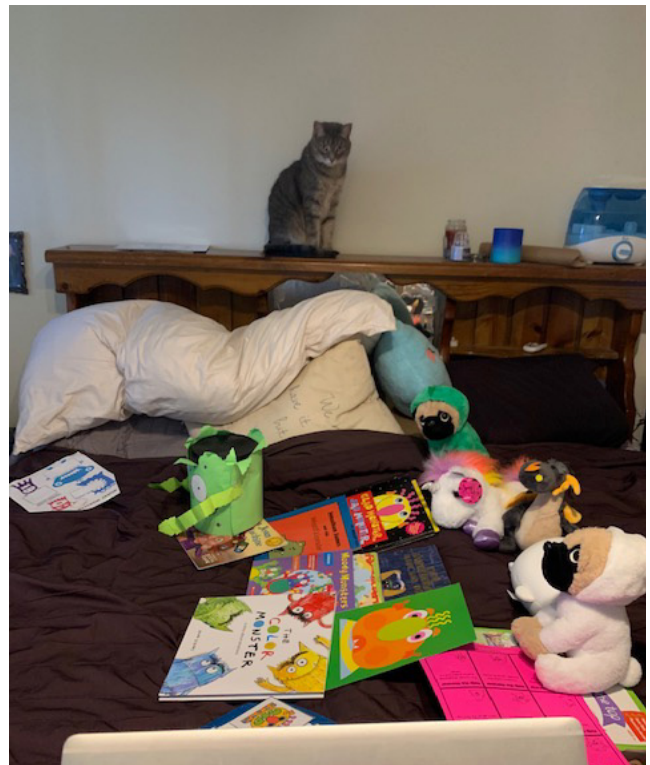
a telehealth video conferencing setting.

"When he picked the worry monster to color, he began talking at length about the numerous fears and worries he had, which was incredibly insightful," she said. "It was a powerful session that ended with the teaching of the worry monster and him beginning to develop his own worry monster."

"I'm not sure it would have occurred without it being on telehealth," said Zavadil-Ryan.

Ideas for making your own worry monster can be found here.

To learn more about the services and programs offered by Best Point Behavioral Health by The Children's Home, visit tchcincy.org.



Behavioral Health Services Therapist Jennifer Zavadil-Ryan says her cat, "Huck," likes to perch in her home office and see what's going on. In addition to her cat, she uses her own Worry Monster and stuffed animals to create the illusion that she and her client are in a traditional treatment room with all their normal and fun items.