

The Worry That Shrank

From the practice of Elliott McCray, Ed.S., The McCray Learning Lab

What this builds (transformative SEL): Agency (“I can do it”).

This is a gentle SEL and early-literacy story for children ages 4-8. June learns a tiny, repeatable recipe for a big feeling, **Name it → Breathe it → Shrink it**, anchored in one relatable night: the evening before a first day at a brand-new school. The recipe is named as working for *any* big worry (the dark, a test, a doctor visit), so the skill transfers.

What it teaches

- **Self-management** (the primary CASEL competency): naming a feeling, one slow calming breath, and choosing one small brave step: a repeatable coping routine the child can run on their own.
- **Regulate before reasoning:** the breath step comes *before* any problem-solving. No breath-hold: breathe in slow, out slower; the long exhale is the calming part.
- **Early literacy (sequencing):** in “Say It in Order,” the child retells the three-step recipe using **first, next, last**: real story-sequence practice on content they just lived.
- **Worry is normal, not bad:** everybody worries, grown-ups too, and brave means feeling the worry AND doing the thing anyway.

At home

Ask your child to teach you the three steps. When a worry feels big, name it together, take one slow breath, and pick one small brave step. Praise the trying, not just the outcome.

This is a **practice tool for rehearsing skills, not therapy, counseling, or a clinical service**. If a child's worry is constant (if it keeps them from sleeping, eating, or going to school), please reach out to a pediatrician, school counselor, or a mental-health professional.

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