



## Adult's Guide to Roar by Billy Black

Talking to children about their feelings is not easy. We might already expect that most children won't have the experience and maturity to be able to easily process difficult emotions and articulate them out loud to adults, whether they're in care or not. Children in care, however, have often had uniquely difficult experiences to process. Without strong consistent emotional supports, those feelings can be more complicated to explain, more painful, and more intense. When you have many painful experiences and emotions, feeling deeply can be frightening. Allowing yourself to feel profound joy makes you vulnerable to profound pain, so children in pain often prefer to focus themselves on more accessible emotions like rage, comedy, and indifference - rather than profound ones like sadness, fear, and joy.

On top of this, many children in care have also experienced *developmental trauma*, where a child has been in a state of persistent stress for long enough that their developing brain has prioritised reacting to perceived dangers with the four Fs: fight, flight, freeze and fawn. Their brain is so focused on wiring itself to respond to danger that it has difficulty processing rationally and understanding long-term consequences. If you ask a child to pack away their toys or mention there are no more eggs, a child who has consistently had their needs met might tell you they don't want to tidy or suggest you buy more eggs. Children who haven't had their needs met may remember being screamed at to tidy up or may remember their mum's special omelette. Their brain, wired for danger, becomes overwhelmed with emotions and doesn't feel safe. Seemingly out of nowhere, the distressed child may surprise you with an intense meltdown designed to cope with immediate danger – screaming, throwing chairs, running away, self-harm. These are the “challenging behaviours” that can elicit similarly defensive coping reactions from distressed adults, cultivating a cycle of coping strategies that can spiral out of control into placement breakdown.

Many children find ways to blame themselves for their situation, so even just discussing difficulties the child faces can quickly provoke a defensive reaction for some. The only way for children to be able to risk changing their behaviour is by living through thousands of safe joyful experiences, which gradually allow them to develop enough trust in their adults to risk discussing painful emotions and how to manage being overwhelmed by them. Carers have an immense task of consistently offering safe joyful situations to their child, even when children may continue to respond with severely challenging coping behaviours.

In *Roar*, I hope to provide adults with a resource for talking to children in care about the difficulties they face, navigating their family identities, emotional regulation, and the intense reactions they have. The discussion questions below are not intended to be a list to read through in sequence and answered one-by-one. Rather, they are suggestions to open discussions that are relevant to the specific child you're working with, or that might be useful to have at particular times.

For instance, a child struggling with missing her brother might use this book as an opportunity to talk about the cub's brother who would surely be among the photos on the bedroom wall. You could take that opportunity to strongly agree it would be the most normal thing in the world for anyone to miss their brother in care. A child who is about to start seeing his mum again for the first time in a while may find it useful to brainstorm more things the cub could choose for family time – a particular worker, game, or what happens afterwards.

Many children in care can surprise you with thoughtful responses about what it feels like in their body when they don't feel safe, the ideal place and thing to do when they're overwhelmed by complicated big feelings, and even signals they could give adults that they need a safe place to spend some quiet time. Some children, however, will find it too emotionally risky to even talk about having "big feelings", so you might find it easier to discuss these concepts in terms of the *cub's* big feelings and how the *cub* can manage them. You might also reframe emotional safety as when your *brain* or *body* doesn't feel safe, rather than "when *you* don't feel safe", to remove some of the personal responsibility for their responses to trauma.

In the author's message I tell children to remind their adults that they don't choose to be "bad", it happens when their brain gets too many big feelings, and that happens to adults, too. You might be tempted to emphasise children's personal responsibility for their actions, thinking that no consequences means no discipline, but please keep your focus on growing that safe, joyful connection to develop their trust in you. Once a child trusts you deeply, then they can feel safe enough to risk discussing their more painful emotions, to risk changing their behaviour in situations that don't feel safe, and to suggest what could help them feel safer in the tough times.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Page	Text	Discussion
1	<b>Born in the jungle, my family's tough We're fun in the good times and brave when it's rough</b>	Is your family tough? Funny? Loud? How else would you describe them?
2	<b>But when I don't really feel safe anymore</b>	Why doesn't the cub feel safe anymore? What feelings do you notice in your body when you don't feel safe? What do you notice happening in your brain?
3	<b>Big feelings grow bigger and soon I feel...</b>	
4	<b>[ROAR!]</b>	Do you ever roar back? What are some good things and bad things about roaring back? Do you roar with some people and not others?
5	<b>Over time I can learn to love a new place... (but it's tough when there's roar on your fur and your face)</b>	Can you remember a time when you felt like you were different from everyone else? Do people ever treat you differently because you're in care? What did you notice?
6	<b>I'm glad sad and mad and I'm ready to spring</b>	Which one do you think is glad or sad or mad? Some feelings can be mixed up together. Can you remember being sad and glad at the same time? Why is the cub sad and glad and mad about visiting his dad?
7	<b>I'm strong so I always feel more than one thing</b>	Do adults get mixed up feelings like this? What do adults do when they have mixed or big feelings?
8	<b>On the surface I'm calm and goofing around But inside those feelings are still mixing round</b>	Can our outsides feel different to our insides? Do you ever hide your inside feelings? Do other kids? Do adults?

9	<b>Even just one tiny bad feeling more</b>	<p>What's something that feels fun when you're happy, but not when you're stressed?</p> <p>Hint: It's usually things that are "difficult" but "exciting", rollercoasters, scary movies, wrestling, seeing someone you haven't seen in a long time</p>
10	<b>Big feelings grow bigger and soon I feel...</b>	
11	<b>[ROAR!]</b>	<p>This time the dad is the one who roars! How do you think the cub feels?</p> <p>What happens when adults show us their big feelings?</p> <p>Have you ever seen an adult show a huge reaction to a tiny thing?</p>
12	<b>Sometimes even when things seem fine I still just don't feel safe inside</b>	<p>Has your body or brain ever felt unsafe inside, even when everything was going well?</p> <p>What messages are our bodies telling us when our insides don't feel safe?</p>
13	<b>Then when I remember something that's sore</b>	<p>This cub used to love being up on dad's shoulders, do you think that feels the same with his foster carer?</p> <p>What's an example of a happy memory that might make the cub feel bad?</p> <p>Do you ever have a happy memory that makes you feel bad?</p>
14	<b>Big feelings grow bigger and soon I feel...</b>	
15	<b>[ROAR!]</b>	<p>Why do you think the cub is angry suddenly?</p> <p>Do you think the cub is angry at the foster carer or upset about something else?</p> <p>If you were the foster carer, would you think the cub was angry at you?</p>
16	<b>Kids are allowed to make lots of mistakes And I've got some good ways to handle those aches</b>	<p>Do you think the cub should get in trouble for roaring? Why or why not?</p> <p>The foster carer got covered in roar! Do you think she's angry? Why or why not?</p> <p>Do you think this foster carer has ever been so angry she yelled at someone before?</p>

17	<b>Like breathing real slow and counting to ten</b>	<p>Why does breathing slowly and counting to ten help you when you're angry (you can just guess)?</p> <p>One good thing about counting out loud is the foster carer hears that and knows to be gentle. What's something that'd help the adults around you know when you have big feelings?</p>
18	<b>Until my paws can relax again</b>	<p>When you're angry, what do your hands feel like?</p> <p>Is there anything else you notice? In your face? Your eyes? Your chest? Your tummy? Your head?</p>
19	<b>I tell all the adults as much as I can</b>	<p>The cub is telling the carer and caseworker they want Family Time to be somewhere they know well near home.</p> <p>Where's a place you and your family know well that you could have Family Time?</p> <p>What other changes might help? (Phone calls? Video calls? Texts? Frequency? What happens after Family Time?)</p>
20	<b>About what feels best when I'm with my clan</b>	<p>This cub likes to play doctors! What would you play with your family? Is there a game you're really good at?</p> <p>What else could we change about Family Time to make it more familiar?</p> <p>Are there other people in your family you want to spend more time with?</p> <p>Are there other important people who aren't in your family that you don't get to see much?</p>
21	<b>Remembering times that were sad or were fun</b>	<p>What was a time you had the most fun ever? How do you remember those good times? Do you have any photos or an object to remind you?</p>
22	<b>Big feelings grow bigger and soon I feel...</b>	
23	<b>1... 2... 3... 4... 5... 6... 7... 8... 9... 10...</b>	<p>The cub was about to roar again, but they caught it just in time!</p> <p>The hardest thing about counting out loud is remembering to do it. This time, they felt their eyes getting wet and their paws getting tense, so they knew it was time to start counting. How would you know when to start counting?</p>
24	<b>[calm crying]</b>	<p>Is crying good or bad? What's good about crying?</p> <p>Do you think crying makes us stronger or sadder?</p>

25	[bedroom covered in photos]	Do you think having all of the photos on show helps? Who do you think would be in these photos? (You can just guess who else is in the cub's life) If you were this cub, who would be in these photos? Is there anyone you wish you had more photos of?
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