

**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**
RIGHT THERE WITH YOU

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



What does super Jonny do when mum gets sick? (2014)

Colwill S, Ting J (illustrator)
Books For Caring Kids, 2014.
38pp.
ISBN 9780994112729.

Average star rating 3.8 (out of 5)

Now also available in Spanish: ¿Qué hace Super Jonny cuando su mamá se enferma?: Un cuento para dar ánimo. July 2016. ISBN 9780994129727.

Macmillan Cancer Support
89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7UQ

These reviews were written by people affected by cancer and are not the views of Macmillan Cancer Support. These reviews, and the publications reviewed, should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this review or publication or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it.



This is very easy to understand, and young children will be able to understand better what is happening. I definitely recommend it.

Breast cancer survivor (36-45) (October 2015)

I was surprised at how good this book is. So often, this type of book can be clichéd and hit the wrong note, but this doesn't; it's fabulous and I love it. It could be used at any stage and potentially several times during diagnosis and treatment.

It's well done, appropriate and well planned, just right for kids aged three to eight. It's very inviting and appealing and I really love the tone; it's friendly and appropriately repetitive so that the message sinks in.

Mum recovering from breast cancer (36-45) (August 2015)

This is such a straightforward, yet powerful, book that anyone in a difficult situation could turn to it as a guide. It would be very useful to introduce it as the child becomes aware of regular investigations being carried out. It can be revisited throughout the illness as often as required to reinforce the importance of ongoing communication.

I love how the story is told, with such sensitivity and honesty. The characters are introduced as just another group of people who can help make the experience less daunting. It is very easy to understand, and the language is just right. It is colourful, and the illustrations show some of the people that a child may meet at the hospital.

I like the basic explanations that a child can understand and relate to. It makes the child feel included by introducing the power of hugs, allowing a level of normality to continue. I also like the guide notes for teachers with the view to having open classroom discussions that are fun, educational, and not frightening. I am assuming there are other similar resources that cover how a child manages changes of treatments and if treatments do not work.

Living with consequences of breast cancer (46-55) (June 2015)

This book would be particularly useful after diagnosis, when it becomes obvious to the child that mummy is poorly. It could also be used in schools, (with sensitivity around any children affected) at any time to stimulate discussion. The story is very clever and easy to understand. It is aimed at 3-9-year olds but is stimulating enough to encourage older children to talk about issues that may be disturbing them. The illustrations are colourful and well drawn

When a parent becomes ill with cancer (or any other illness), it can be frightening for children. They don't understand but have an overwhelming desire to be helpful; what can they do other than 'be good'!? This book is cleverly written to illustrate this desire and features Super Jonny, who plays at being a kind of superman with his Teddy as a kind of Robin. As superheroes, they have all sorts of gadgets that could potentially help mummy. It is poignantly sad to read as an adult – recognising how children will try to help, knowing that what Jonny is bringing is childish and not necessarily helpful – but the story shows otherwise. The inspirational links to all those around Jonny's mum who need those gadgets to help them help her, made me feel very moved. The major theme, which is that all that Jonny really needs to do to help his mum is to show her he loves her and give her a hug, brought a tear to my eye.

What is even more incredible is that the book has guide notes for teachers with links to the National Curriculum and even some tips for parents who may be going into hospital; things to help the child process that trauma. I am impressed by the thought and attention to detail. When I started it, I thought it was a simple picture book, but it is so much more than that. Thank you for allowing me to review it.

Cancer survivor (56-65) (June 2015)



I like the sensitive approach and empowering nature of this book. It is best shared by an adult with a child. The print size is good for children to manage, but this may encourage adults to leave it to the child and the content may be wasted if a child reads it without adult support; there is much to discuss on each page.

I like the diversity of culture represented but it is a shame that the hero is a boy. This raises gender issues and it may be better to have a female heroine alongside Jonny. There are good explanations in the glossary.

The age suitability is wide; it may not be appropriate for a two-year-old and a nine-year-old may find it too babyish. Advice on how to use the book (pp. 32-33) should be more prominent; this is good advice for all adults reading the book with children, not just teachers. Terms such as Pre-K are not appropriate for the UK.

Educational consultant (66-75) (September 2015)

This is useful for a child to read or an adult to read to a child once the adult has been diagnosed and is ready to explain and prepared for questions to come.

The colours are bold but not too bright and the pictures are easy to understand, although I don't like the use of colours to portray certain characters and I find it misleading how the binoculars helped the radiographer. I like the fact that Jonny has his pal bear with him. There is no glossary, but there are helpful notes for teachers and to help parents prepare for hospital admission.

I might recommend it provided there is an adult nearby to answer questions. It is light hearted but young children still need adult supervision.

Childhood leukaemia survivor, now living with ovarian cancer (36-45) (September 2015)

This is useful for a child who knows someone with cancer or any long-term condition, it is not cancer specific. It should be introduced early on at diagnosis. It explains everyone's role, how the child can help, involving the child so they don't feel left out.

I suggest it is aimed at young children aged four to six. It is very basic and easy to understand with a fun, enticing cover. Using a superhero to travel the journey is a lovely idea. The illustrations are fun and bright, and the story involves the child; there is a lot in the pictures to talk about. The guidance at the back is useful to prompt discussion and engage with the child. It doesn't cover illness out of the hospital setting, which may be of benefit with more treatment happening at home. It would also be useful to discuss some of the symptoms that the adult may experience. I found that was more traumatic for my children than the diagnosis.

I might recommend it, depending on the diagnosis of the individual, their relationship to the child and the setting for treatment.

Brain tumour (oligodendroglioma) patient; parent of two young children (26-35) (July 2015)

This lovely, bright, and colourful book would be lovely for any parent to use with a child who is apprehensive about hospitals. It is very clear and gives a basic introduction to the key people that the child may meet when they visit anyone in hospital, so is best read before a visit or stay in hospital.

It is easy to understand, and the glossary is well set up with guidelines for adults. I like the diversity of the illustrations and how colourful it is. There is just enough text on each page to keep a child's attention. However, two to nine years is a large age range. I feel there may be a little too much information for a two-year-old but not enough for a nine-year old.

Young mum (26-35) (June 2015)

This book should be used when the child is aware that medical intervention is required, when they know that the adult will need some treatment. It is very clear and easy to understand and appropriate probably to the end of key stage 1. It uses language and rhythm that a child could connect to and is beautifully illustrated. I like that it not only explains who the people are, but how the child can help make their parent better too, just by being themselves.

Some professionals that might be involved are omitted, e.g. a pharmacist, and some are included that may not be relevant, such as a dietician. The description of the nurse rather sells them short! The nurse could have been used as the opportunity to introduce IV drips. Some additional information (drips, chemo, and radiotherapy) would make it more useful for cancer patients, but I appreciate it's written by a Crohn's patient, so the view is rather different and that doesn't mean it's not useful.

Parent living with bowel cancer (36-45) (June 2015)

This is useful to read to young children whose parent, other or relative or friend needs hospital treatment. It is a simple introduction to the roles of various health professionals and will help children understand how they can help. It doesn't specify the nature of mum's illness, making it relevant to a wide range of illnesses. It feels most appropriate for younger children age two to seven; children any older would probably benefit from something a little more detailed.

It is most useful to read prior to planned hospital admission (or post admission if the hospital visit is unexpected). The book portrays the patient as an inpatient, but it may also be relevant if children are accompanying someone to outpatient appointments.

I read it to my sons, aged five and seven; the superhero theme and cover made them eager to have it read. The illustrations are really appealing; my children commented on some of the detail and liked the humour in them. Overall, the text is simple, but includes a few 'tricky' words that I had to explain to my five-year-old.

The notes for parents and teachers are good in prompting follow up discussion with children, particularly in encouraging them to think of other ways they could help someone who is sick and where relevant, relating it to the child's situation. Children can also help by drawing pictures to put up in hospital or taking in photos of themselves. There are some tips for mums ahead of a planned hospital admission; they're easy things to do that will make the experience of visiting easier for children, but they're probably not at the forefront of someone's mind, so the prompt is helpful.

I like that the story highlights how children's super-powered hugs can help – something all children can do regardless of age (although it could do with a note of caution about being mindful of any wounds or tubes attached to a patient). In the story, it shows how mummy can use all of Jonny's gadgets in some way to help various health professionals; whilst that's a nice idea in theory, I hope it doesn't detract from the overall message that giving cuddles and hugs is something that children can directly do to help.

Ovarian cancer patient (36-45) (June 2015)

This will be useful for parents to explain what will happen once treatment begins. It is also useful for other family members, health professionals and for teachers to have as a resource in case a child's parent is ill with any life-threatening condition.

The story is easy to follow and shows how simple acts of kindness are appreciated. Everything is easy to understand. It is colourful and very well illustrated and a very alternative book, one that would draw children to read it.

I like the story and the notes for teachers. It's one of those stories where you can't wait to discover the outcome. However, the intended age range is large – too much information for a two-year-old child, but not enough for a nine-year-old.

Living with breast cancer (56-65) (June 2015)

I love how the story is told and the look of the book. It's very easy to understand, bright and colourful – a great book for children when mum is having treatment.

Breast cancer patient (36-45) (June 2015)

As this book is about a mum who is ill, not necessarily with cancer, it would be useful to use with any young child whose mum (or dad) is debilitated with a fairly severe illness. It is probably best read early on but, as most young children like to have stories read repeatedly, it could well become one of those as mum's (or dad's) illness will be ongoing. It will also serve as a good reminder to the child of the many ways in which s/he could help if it is read from time to time.

It is aimed at very young children and as such illustrates appropriately the jobs that small children associate with illness. It gives just the right amount of information about what professionals are doing and covers exactly what young children think of regarding doctors, nurses, and cleaners. It introduces healthy living ideas, such as cleanliness and good nutrition – a real bonus. It is well aimed at its target group.

I like the way the author has used the "super hero" idea – this is very appropriate for this age group. It is a clever way to enable a small child to feel s/he can help and from this point of view it would be very appealing to little children. The illustrations are clear and bright and imaginative. However, I must admit I simply prefer softer/gentler illustrations in children's books. This reminds me of Dr Seuss style illustrations, which are not such a hit with me! But I am sure children will love it.

I gave it a four-star rating simply because it is for a restricted age group. It is a good little book for young children up to about the age of four years. It does not address the fear that might be experienced by a child whose mum is sick because it is working on the premise that the child has not yet reached an age where s/he can understand the implications of a severe illness. Four is an approximate age and it will depend on the intellectual ability of the child, but I would suggest up to about that age

Kidney cancer (renal cell carcinoma) patient and retired primary school teacher/head teacher (66-75) (May 2015)



This colourful and cheerful book is best used as soon as hospitalisation becomes a possibility. It applies to any period of hospitalisation, not specifically cancer, and there are no medical terms. Each page is full of items/topics to discuss with a child.

The only thing I dislike is the stereotyping of characters; e.g. male white doctor with coloured female cleaner. Also, it covers so many scenarios to reinforce its message that a child may lose interest before the final, all-important, message.

Living with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (66-75) (April 2016)

This would be useful at any stage. I like the fact that it is something I can read with my two-year-old daughter about a familiar situation. She is already used to visiting hospitals and coming for treatment with me, even helping the nurses, and could relate to the story and characters.

It is easy to understand and the information for adults at the end is a clever idea. I like the idea and the character. My daughter seems to enjoy it and likes the bear. The illustrations are colourful, and my daughter especially likes the page that has a circle of all the different faces.

I enjoyed reading and reviewing this and my daughter enjoyed it, but I prefer the word 'poorly' rather than 'sick'; it sounds less scary; my daughter says 'poorly'; to her, 'sick' means vomit. The part where Jonny says, 'why won't anyone let me help Mum?' and talks about helping her run away is uncomfortable and unnecessary. I feel it might put the idea in my daughter's head that she can't help or isn't helping. It's great that Jonny helps his mum with super hugs and I understand that some children may feel they can't help but I skip this part and add in bits about how my daughter already helps Mummy, like the nurses.

Melanoma patient (36-45) (June 2015)

This book is very clearly set out with good sized text and pictures. There is detail in the pictures to support discussion. I particularly love the way there is minimal text and how the pictures tell the story. It gives plenty of opportunity to then talk with the child, for example about the roles of different professionals, and discuss emotions, such as the feeling of helplessness. The guidance at the back supports the opening up of conversations and although it is aimed at teachers, it could help families too.

Some young children will be confused at the start as to whether Jonny is a little boy in a family or a fantasy character. This confusion is added to by the way in which he hears about mum's illness. A picture at the start labelled Jonny and his mum and dad would achieve this, but not in a hospital setting. The current picture at the start is confusing – is the fourth person his sister? There are also some Americanisms in the book; sidekick, for example, is not commonly used by young children here.

Aspects of this book are very good and age appropriate e.g. the way the role of the professionals is woven in, how it explores the feelings of wanting to help but feeling useless, using minimal text, and maximising the use of pictures to tell the story. It would be better if it is made clearer at the start that Jonny is not a fantasy super hero and he is told of his mother's illness in a way that a child could identify with.

Carer (56-65) (June 2015)

This would be most useful for children whose parent is diagnosed with cancer or another serious illness. It is best read at diagnosis as this is the most fearful and vulnerable time. It uses words that children won't understand (e.g. radiologist) but these are easily explained, and it also adds an educational aspect. The only criticism I have is that children in the UK don't use the word 'sick' in the same way; they tend to use 'ill' or 'poorly'. It is perfect for other countries that use the phrase.

I like the illustrations; they are different from most other children's books. As a mum, I particularly like the ending; if my illness ever came back, all I would need from my daughter is hugs too.

I read this book to my four-year-old niece and she said she enjoyed it. I asked her at the end what she would do if her mummy was ever poorly and her response was 'give her lots of hugs', which is, I think, the purpose of the book. Children want to try to help as much as possible in a situation like this; this book will help them to understand that there are many people involved in making their mum/parent better and that they can help by being affectionate and caring.

Former patient (26-35) (June 2015)



This book may be useful after diagnosis, before going to hospital, as it clearly shows what it is like in hospital and who will be helping mum get better. I like that the mother says that Jonny's super hero cuddles have power and make her feel better.

I like the look of the book, but the story did not do much for me. It could have been more personal about how it would benefit the child, and pages 20-21 seem unnecessary. The language is not appropriate for a two-year-old, more for four years and upwards. Words like laboratory assistant, radiographer, turbo charge, repellent, dietician and specimen jar are too difficult for younger children. Although they are explained, I don't think that younger children will fully understand.

I have not read any other books about how things are explained to children, but I did not like this approach.

Breast cancer survivor (56-65) (June 2015)

This is a good book for a very young child, i.e. under school age. It states that it is suitable for children from two to nine but, in my experience, a six-year-old would find it babyish. It will be most useful to read when mum is due to go into hospital. I love the cover and very small children will find the illustrations good to engage with.

Although it is appealing to look at, it is more of a fairy tale than a factual story of mum having treatment in hospital. It is not very informative, and it is farfetched; it is doubtful if a child visiting mum in hospital would meet many of the characters, although it does teach a child about the many people who work in a hospital. I don't like the fact that 'mum' gives the child's toys to professionals.

I have five grandchildren between the ages of three and 15. If appropriate, I would show this book to my three-year-old grandson but having read it with my other four grandchildren I think it is suitable only for children up to the age of five or six.

Grandma living after surgery and chemo for colon cancer (56-65) (June 2015)

Further information

Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

We're here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we're right there with you.

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

© Macmillan Cancer Support, March 2020

Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SCO39907) and the Isle of Man (604).