

For additional information on family violence
and how to support families and their
children struggling with domestic violence:

Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault Hotline
1-800-838-8238 (V/tty)
Free confidential. 24 hours a day

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

This material is funded through the Virginia Department of
Social Services grant
SVC-06-058-24

For information on how to obtain additional copies of this
booklet, send an e-mail request to
Loudoun Citizens for Social Justice, Inc.:
laws@lcsj.org



www.lcsj.org

Family Court Through the Eyes of Children



*A workbook for children whose
families have gone to court
due to family violence*

Written and Illustrated by Lindy Swimm MAE, LCSW

Author's Note

Assisting children who have been exposed to family violence is key to their healing and developmental growth.

Providing basic information, safe options when fighting occurs, and support for all family members can be some of the most effective interventions to assist a family struggling with domestic violence issues.

The story of Katie is a compilation of true life stories about real children from homes where violence has occurred. The strategies presented in this booklet are drawn from the creative survival adaptations of actual children and families, as well as successful interventions used with children and families attempting to change violent interaction patterns in their homes.



Katie still feels that she needs to have a simple, clear safety plan. It is best if both parents show their love by creating a safety plan with Katie, José and Manny, and by following it.

Katie's Safety Plan:

- ◆ Stay out of the fight
- ◆ Know how to protect yourself during a fight
- ◆ Know each parent's address
- ◆ Know when to call the police (9-1-1)
- ◆ Know what neighbors are safe to go to when the fighting is dangerous
- ◆ Create a safe place in your head when parents say bad things about each other
- ◆ Picture yourself as strong and brave
- ◆ Have a safe spot in the house where you can go to get away from the fighting
- ◆ Tell an adult who is safe

Family Court Through the Eyes of Children

A workbook for children whose families have gone to court due to family violence

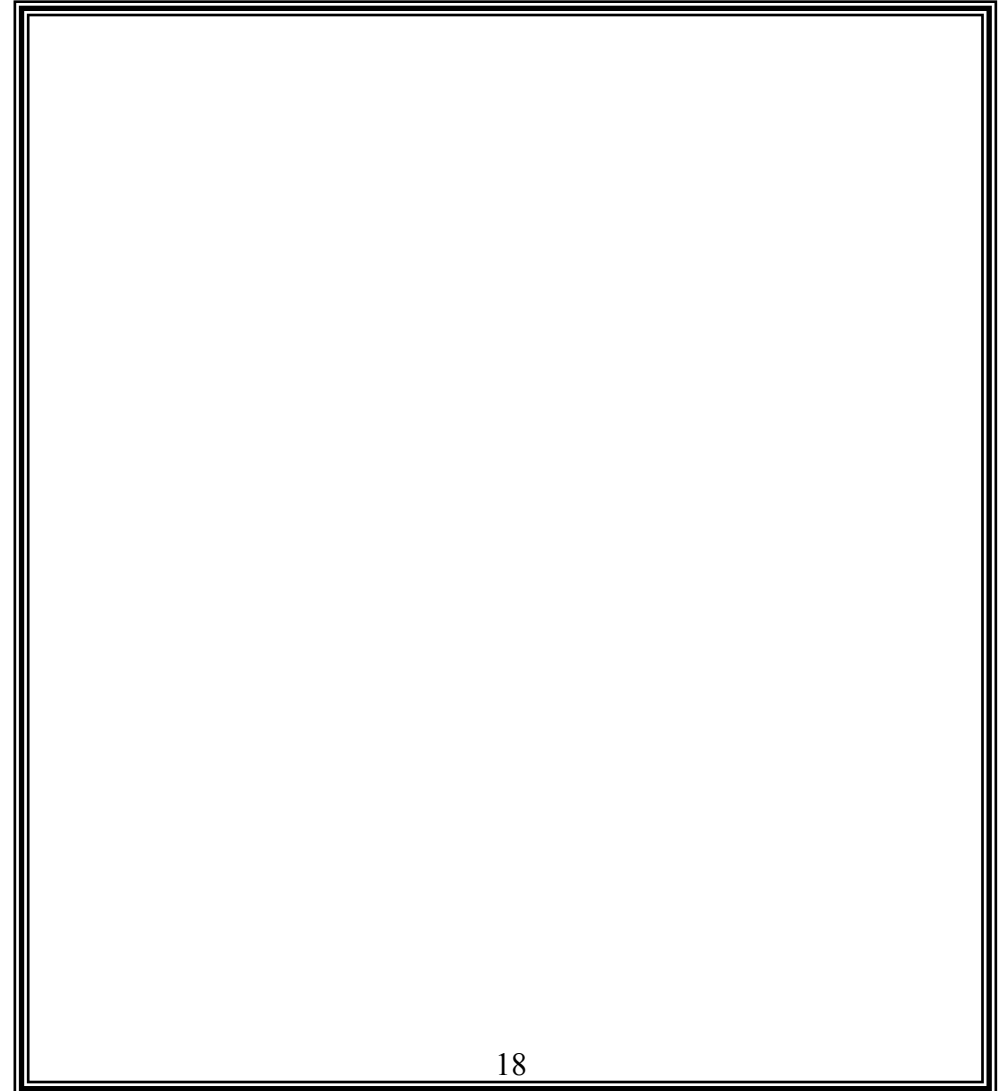
by LINDY SWIMM, MAE, LCSW

Katie is thirteen years old. She lives with her mother and has two brothers: José is four and Manny is seven.

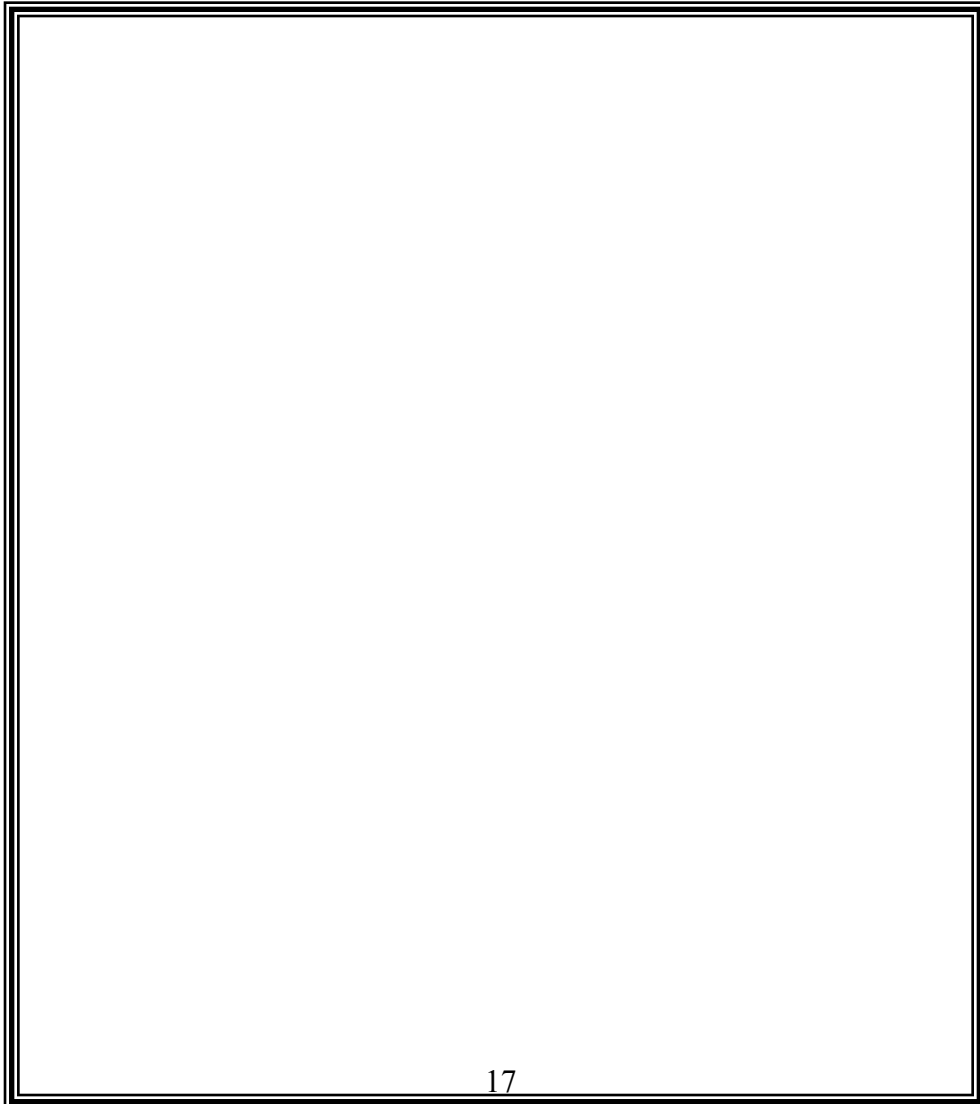
Katie likes school and gets along well with her teachers and peers. She enjoys art class and is really good in math. She loves hanging out with her best friend Melody. They watch their favorite movies together, write stories, and spend endless hours shopping and trying on different outfits. They also like to dance, listen to music, play card games, and talk on the phone.

Katie cannot spend as much time as she would like to hanging out with Mel and her other friends because her parents do not live together anymore. She lives with her mother during the week and goes to her father's every other weekend.

Draw a container to hold your big feelings. It can be something imaginary or real. This container will hold all of your strong feelings and help you believe you can handle them until you are ready to take them out and feel them safely. What feelings would you put in your container?



Draw an imaginary or a real place where Katie can feel safe and like nothing will hurt her. Draw your safe place.



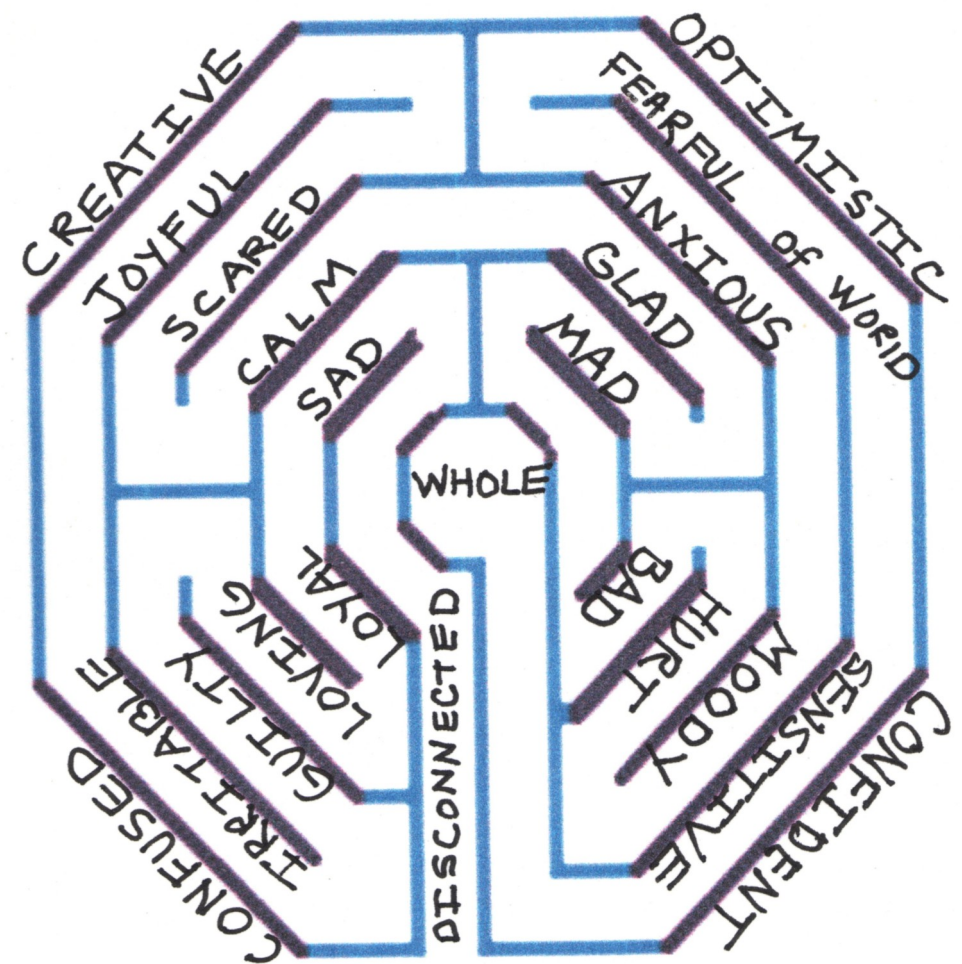
Mel's friendship is very important to Katie. Mel supports her and is always there for her when she needs to talk to a friend.

Katie's parents do not live together because her father did not know how to show in a safe way that he was mad, frustrated, scared, or even that he cared about the family. Her mother felt that anything she tried just made things worse. Katie's parents could not live together anymore after the night that the police came to their house and arrested her father for domestic violence.

The day after the police came, Katie's parents had to go to the courthouse. A courthouse is where judges make sure laws are followed and families can get help when unsafe fighting occurs. The court calls unsafe fighting "family violence" or "domestic violence." It is sad when families have to go to court, because it means they cannot solve their problems on their own anymore.

Almost every town or city has a courthouse. It is usually big, looks official, and is in the center of town. Do you know where your town's courthouse is?

Help Katie get to the center:



Can you think of any other things that could help Katie? Draw or write them here. What other things would you have done to help yourself on a visitation?

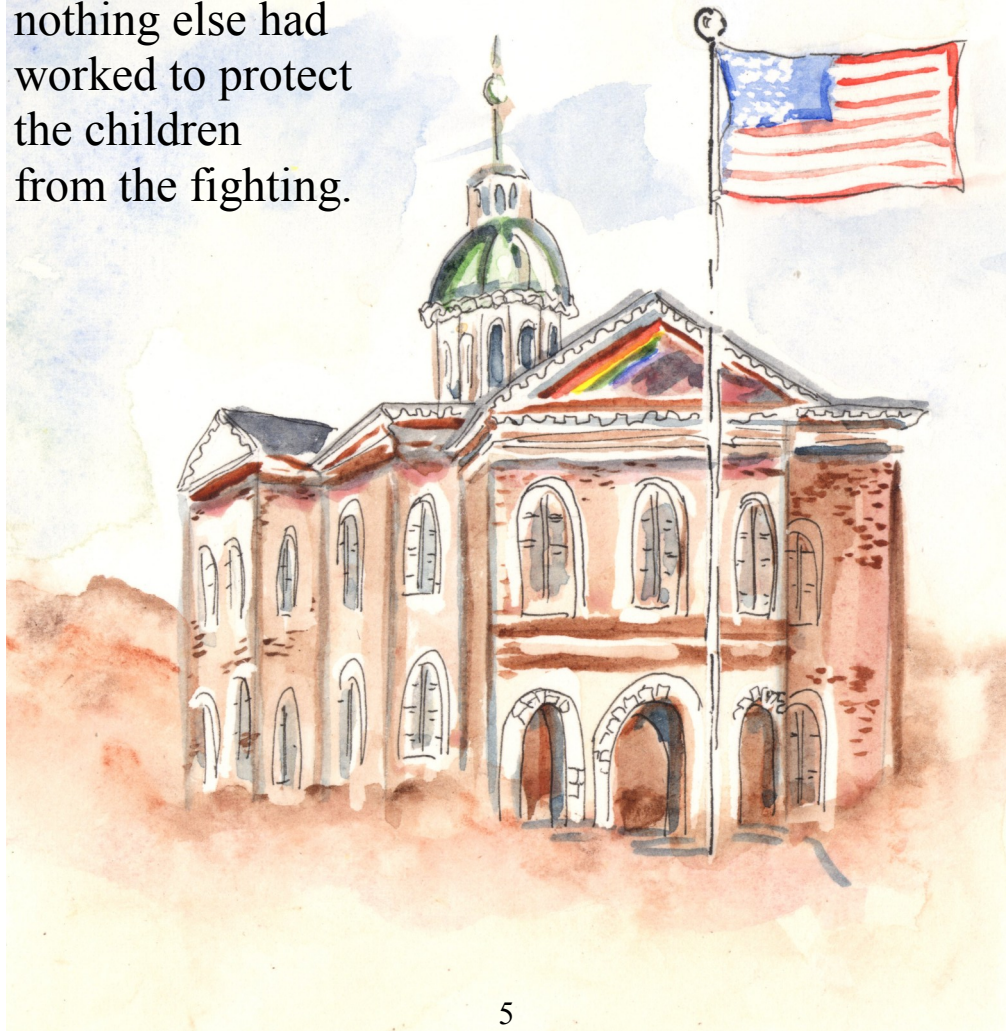
When you go to the courthouse, a person called a judge decides what's right and what's wrong. The judge makes decisions about how to help families stay safe. Both of Katie's parents had to talk to the judge about the fighting that happened in their family.

Katie's mother could not safely separate from her father or protect Katie and her two younger brothers from the physical violence that occurred. One time, her brother Manny got in the middle of a fight between her parents and got hurt. The judge did not want this to happen again.

Katie's mother asked the court for help. The judge issued a legal document called a protective order. It meant that her mother and father had to stay away from each other until the court order ended or was changed by the judge.

The protective order makes it clear that if Katie's father fights with her mother again, he could be arrested. It also says when, how long, and where Katie's visits with her father will be. Everyone must obey the protective order.

Katie's family members did not like having to live their lives by following the protective order, but nothing else had worked to protect the children from the fighting.



Draw a line from a problem Katie might have on one of her visitations with her dad to a possible solution:

PROBLEM

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

Katie misses her mother

Identify what makes Dad mad and avoid conflict.

Her father speaks badly of her mother

Tell herself it is okay to love both parents.

Her father asks questions about her mother

Ask her mother to set up a time when she can call during the visit.

Katie is afraid that Dad will get mad

Try telling Dad, "I feel bad when you say that."

Katie doesn't want to go on the visit

Try saying to Dad, "Please ask Mom about that."

Katie misses her friends

Tell herself her family will always be her family, even if it has changed.

She feels angry about the family changes

See if she can use the computer to chat online.

Dad is threatening to take younger brothers and leave the state

Plan things she likes to do that will help the visit go well.

Katie feels split loyalties

Tell a trusted adult as soon as possible and have a safety plan in place.

Katie can't call her mother when visiting

Bring a photo of her mom and think of the things she wants to tell her when she gets home.

Mark the things that you think Katie's mother and father could do to help her when she goes on visits with her father. Cross out the ones that would not be helpful.

Ask Katie to keep her feelings to herself

Encourage Katie to problem solve and find solutions

Be open to talking about the violence with Katie

Help Katie understand her response to the violence

Send an angry note with Katie when on a visit

Not talk bad about a parent when they miss their visitation with Katie

Recognize Katie's losses and name the grief reaction

Acknowledge Katie's right to her feelings

Tell Katie to keep the family violence a secret

Respect Katie's feelings for the other parent

Tell Katie to ask her father for the rent check

Remind Katie that she is not alone

Tell Katie she does not have to go on a visit if she doesn't want to

Help Katie to increase her self protection skills

Remind Katie to practice taking deep breaths from the belly

Focus on Katie's strengths and helping her feel better

Katie had to talk to the judge about the fighting and about what she saw the night that the police came. The judge needed to listen to Katie so he could decide where she should live after her parents separated. If her parents could not follow the protective order, then the judge would have to find a safe home for Katie and her brothers.

It was so hard for Katie, because she did not want to hurt her mother or her father. She did not want to tell the judge that she remembered seeing her parents fight ever since she was little. She felt ashamed to tell the court that sometimes it was a frightening home to live in.

When Katie had to go to court, she felt sick to her stomach and her head felt like it would explode. She had never been inside of a courthouse before, and it felt like she had done something wrong. She could not understand what was happening to her family.

Katie didn't know who to trust anymore. Her family had kept the fighting a secret for so long that she thought all families must be like hers.

Fill in the blanks to help Katie go to court:

What adult can Katie get help from?

Should Katie tell about the fights in her home? Why?

What can help Katie do to feel less scared and anxious when she goes to court?

Who do you think Katie should live with? Why?

How can Katie believe that the fighting was not her fault?

What inner strengths does Katie have to help her feel strong and courageous?



Katie and her brothers were ordered by the judge to live with their mother during the week and with their father every other weekend. Katie hated this and did not understand why she had to do what the judge said. Katie was afraid that her father would get angry and start a fight. Check off what Katie could do to feel safe and protect herself if that happens while she is on a visit:

- Call a friend
- Think of your body and mind and spirit as strong and powerful
- Talk to a guidance counselor or teacher at school
- Have a safety plan that both parents have helped create and will agree to follow
- Stay out of the fighting
- Call the police
- Go to a safe place
- Get away, if possible
- Identify someone in her family to talk to
- Know what to say to get help quickly
- Believe she has the right to protect herself
- Imagine that she is strong and courageous
- Believe that she has the right to be safe

A lawyer in court helped Katie talk to the judge about the fighting in her family. The lawyer told her just to tell the truth.

The truth was, she was scared.

The truth was, she was confused.

The truth was, her family was in pain.

The truth was...

...she loved both her mother and her father.

...she just wanted to feel safe.

...she could not stop the fighting.

...she felt scared when they fought.

The truth was, she wanted her family to stay together, even though they hurt each other.

The truth was, sometimes she felt scared when she went to visit her father.

The truth was...

...she did not want to be in court.

...she felt totally helpless and overwhelmed.

...she had nightmares.

The truth was...

...her brothers fought all the time.

...she missed her parents not living together.

...she had no idea how to feel better.

Katie could not change what happened. Check off the things that you think Katie could have done to help her feel strong and courageous when she went to court.

- Know that the fighting was not her fault
- Know that she is not alone
- Know that other families have problems
- Know that violent fighting is not okay
- Know that she does not have to hide her feelings or feel afraid of her feelings
- Imagine that she is her favorite strong, courageous animal
- Think of a superhero or another adult she trusts and looks up to and picture that person in her head
- Take deep breaths from her belly
- Imagine a safe place in her head that nothing and no one can make unsafe
- Believe that she is strong enough to handle it
- Believe that there are adults she can trust
- Believe that she can feel better and that there are people who can help her
- Picture herself as powerful, relaxed and calm

Find the words below that describe the different feelings in this family because of the domestic violence:

fear, worry, unsafe, mad, sad, lonely, scared, lost, confused, abused, hurt, guilt, ashamed, danger, terror, grief, loss, betrayed, bad, sorry, blame, weak

F	A	D	E	K	R	I	A	R	S
B	E	D	F	A	B	U	S	E	D
E	H	A	G	E	A	H	H	W	D
C	D	S	R	W	D	G	A	X	E
I	A	B	C	Q	S	F	M	Q	Y
J	B	E	T	R	A	Y	E	D	A
T	W	A	Y	P	U	E	D	A	R
E	O	Z	L	O	N	D	J	B	T
R	R	Y	E	N	S	C	K	Z	E
R	R	X	N	M	A	S	L	C	B
O	Y	C	O	N	F	U	S	E	D
R	D	W	L	L	E	B	M	O	G
K	R	A	D	K	T	A	N	D	L
W	Q	V	N	Y	R	R	O	S	L
L	O	U	E	G	U	Z	P	E	Y
L	P	T	F	J	E	Y	M	F	F
M	O	S	G	I	V	R	A	V	I
N	O	S	C	A	R	E	D	U	R
D	A	M	T	H	W	X	Q	T	G