

## **Interview with Jill Osborne, author of *Sam Feels Better Now: An Interactive Story for Children***

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is pleased to interview Jill Osborne, who is here to discuss her new book "Sam Feels Better Now: An Interactive Story for Children."

*Jill Osborne graduated from Toccoa Falls College in 2001 with a Bachelor of Science in Counseling Skills and Psychology. After that, she went to work for the state of Georgia in a psychosocial rehabilitation and peer support program. During that time she completed a Master of Science (M.S.) in professional counseling in 2006 and a Specialist in Education (Ed.S) in professional counseling in 2007 from Georgia State University in Atlanta, GA. There she specialized in play therapy, traumatology, and child and adolescent therapy.*

*During her graduate studies, Jill interned and did contract work with a domestic violence agency for two years. Her experience there included counseling with women and children who were survivors of domestic violence situations. She found her niche when she began using play therapy with children, and leading a support group for child survivors of domestic violence. She is currently working to provide home counseling to families and children.*

**Tyler:** Welcome, Jill. I'm glad you could join me today. I am impressed by your writing a book for children on the sensitive aspects of trauma. To begin, will you tell us what made you decide to write "Sam Feels Better Now"?

**Jill:** I was taking a graduate course at Georgia State University on traumatology, and studied how to help clients who have experienced a traumatic event like a fire, abuse, or war related experiences. One of our assignments was to do a project for the class using concepts we had learned. We were allowed to be creative and pick our area of interest. So, my area of interest in counseling is children and play therapy, and I have always wanted to write a children's book, so I used the opportunity there to write one for the class. I was also inspired because I used children's picture books in therapy a lot, and also workbooks for children, and I wanted to try to blend the two together. It has gone through many revisions since then. In fact, I think my professors for the class (it was taught by two professors, Dr. Greg Brack and Dr. Cathy Brack, they are married) will be surprised at how much I have revised it.

**Tyler:** Will you explain to our readers what is the trauma Sam experienced?

**Jill:** Sam's trauma is left open so that when a child is working with this book he or she can use his or her own experiences in defining what experience Sam has had.

**Tyler:** So is it possible Sam's trauma could be anything from something scary like being bit by a dog to something more dramatic like being molested?

**Jill:** Yes, Sam's trauma could be a variety of things, sexual abuse, physical or verbal abuse, natural disaster, war, dog bites. I left it open for the child to decide, and for therapists and caregivers to decide if the child they are working with could benefit. I did gear it toward the more severe experiences children might have, such as abuse, but trauma is unique to each person. One child might experience a dog bite as a minor incident, cry, get medical

attention, and have few other troubles, whereas another child might experience it in a more traumatic way and develop nightmares of dogs, a fear of dogs, or other disturbances.

**Tyler:** What is the direct purpose of “Sam Feels Better Now”? Is it to help children deal with the trauma, or to help them overcome the fear of coming to therapy so they may deal with the trauma? At what point would the book be given to a child—before or when he or she enters therapy?

**Jill:** The purpose of the book is to help children who have experienced traumatic events to be able to learn how to cope, and reduce the effects of traumatic stress. At the same time it goes through many steps a therapist would use to help a child, so it is also a resource for therapists by giving almost a step by step way of working with a child.

The book would preferably be used in the beginning of therapy; however, each individual therapist can choose to use it in other stages. My hope is not to replace therapy with a book, but for it to be a part of a child’s overall experience, and to encourage therapists to use creative expression and play in helping children recover. Some parents or others who care for children may decide to buy it prior to going to therapy, but I would encourage them that if their child has experienced a trauma or crisis situation, they would find a trained professional to help them.

**Tyler:** Jill, will you explain to us about the interactive exercises the book provides for children? What is the purpose of the exercises?

**Jill:** There are several interactive components to the book: Most of the interactive components are creative drawing exercises to get the child using the story to project his or her own experience into the story, and the exercises are there to encourage creativity and introduce children to Sam’s world. These follow initial stages of trauma therapy such as identifying the source of the problem (what the traumatic event was), people who can be supportive, and making a safety plan, identifying feelings, learning how feelings can be felt in your body, and ways to relax. There are also storytelling activities that allow the child to choose ways to tell a story about Sam, and also another story that they choose. Some ways the child can tell a story are through puppets, sand tray activities, or other activities that they decide. It is left open to promote a creative, personal, and individual experience for each child. Many of the activities are written from Sam’s perspective also, in order to create some distance for the child. This is important for some children who may not be able to talk directly about their own experiences either developmentally, or other reasons. Instead they can use Sam to tell their story.

**Tyler:** Is it best for the children to do the exercises on their own, or should a parent or a counselor assist them?

**Jill:** Younger children should use this book with a parent or counselor. Older children can read it on their own; however, I encourage counselors to process the book with them during session.

**Tyler:** Do you know if any children have used the book, and can you tell us what were the results?

**Jill:** I am currently working on putting together a project to research the use of this book with children. That will give some feedback, and hopefully some empirical backing for the book. The final details are not yet finished. I am also asking colleagues that I know will use the book to give me any feedback they may have.

**Tyler:** What kinds of responses have you received from counselors or parents about “Sam Feels Better Now”?

**Jill:** Counselors have responded well to the book, many of them saying that they are always looking for new resources to use with children. They also seem to like the idea of a fully illustrated workbook with a story line, and the ability for a child to use Sam’s story as a metaphor for their own. There are so many books out there that are workbooks for children, and I wanted mine to be fun to read, work in, I want it to feel less like work, but at the same time be a therapeutic benefit.

**Tyler:** Jill, what are the warning signs that a child may need to go to therapy?

**Jill:** Each child is different, and it is hard to give every symptom to look for, but here are some basics. Also, rule out any medical problems.

Changes in sleeping habits (too much or not enough), changes in appetite, either withdrawing from friends, or fighting with them a lot, sexual acting out (such as dressing too sexual for age, sexual behavior that is inappropriate

for age), nightmares/bad dreams, traumatic play. Traumatic play is different from regular children's play, where the child's play almost looks more pressed, like the child has to play it out. Vs. non-traumatic play where a child looks more relaxed in their play. Also, a sudden drop in grades at school, withdrawing from others or becoming aggressive with others.

**Tyler:** What age group is "Sam Feels Better Now" written for?

**Jill:** Ages 4-10 years.

**Tyler:** What do you think makes "Sam Feels Better Now" special among therapy books? Are most therapy books designed for counselors or parents to help children? Is it unusual to have a book written directly for children?

**Jill:** "Sam Feels Better Now" is special because it is a fully illustrated picture book that incorporates activities within a storyline, and is written in order to create some distance between the child and his or her problem, and the child can project his or her own experience into the book. It also uses ideas from drawing techniques, story telling techniques and principles of trauma therapy.

Yes, there are many therapeutic books for children, including picture books and activity books. Sometime there are books that were not necessarily written for that population that can be helpful also. It is not unusual to have a book written directly for children, but it is unusual for the activities to be written from a character's perspective rather than the child/client's perspective. Most of the activity books are more direct. I was trying to get away from that, because some children are not ready to talk directly about their traumatic experiences, for example due to their developmental age.

**Tyler:** Jill, in your experience what has changed or what newer information or methods do we have now about counseling children who have experienced trauma compared to what the methods were just a few years or decades ago? Would you say "Sam Feels Better Now" is a softer or wiser approach to child counseling?

**Jill:** In my experience it seems that there is a growing interest in child therapy in general, and that practitioners are searching for approaches that are developmentally appropriate for children (such as play). There is still a need for solid research on child therapy, and what approaches work, especially young children (ages 10 and younger), although there are institutions and individuals that are contributing to this effort.

There are many approaches to working with traumatized children. My training and experience is in play therapy, and I have especially been inspired by child-centered therapy, expressive therapies (like art therapy) and Adlerian therapy. "Sam Feels Better Now" is a softer approach than other approaches, where I hoped to incorporate ideas from my theoretical background with the concepts that are important in trauma therapy, which are more cognitive-behavioral based. There are other approaches that can also work with children; this book, "Sam Feels Better Now" reflects mine.

**Tyler:** Thank you for joining me today, Jill. Before we go, will you tell our readers about your website and what additional information can be found there about "Sam Feels Better Now: An Interactive Story for Children"?

**Jill:** I have two main websites. Jill's Writing and Play Therapy Page is: [www.jillosborne.org](http://www.jillosborne.org). There you will find more information about my book, "Sam Feels Better Now: An Interactive Story for Children," updates on promotional events (such as interviews like this) and in the future I will post about other writing projects that I have planned. My second website is Jill's Play Therapy Info Page: <http://jilloplayinfo.blogspot.com>. That page is specifically for play therapy and child therapy resources, including books, websites, topics, etc...In the future I hope to invite some guest bloggers to discuss specific topics as well. This one is in the beginning stages. I can also be found on myspace at <http://www.myspace.com/jillswritingpage> and Jacketflap: [www.jacketflap.com/jillchz](http://www.jacketflap.com/jillchz)

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