

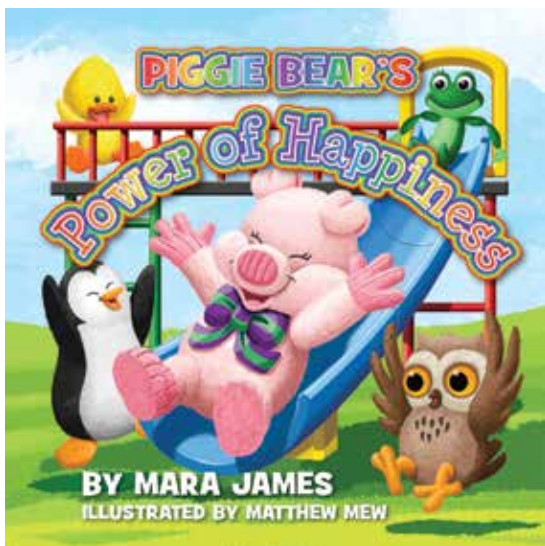
PIGGIE BEAR'S

POWER OF HAPPINESS

By Mara James

Illustrated by Matthew Mew

“Mara James is changing the mental health narrative.”
—*Story Monsters Inc. Magazine*



Award-winning author, and Extraordinary Lives Founder/CEO Mara James, returns with her much anticipated next book, *Piggie Bear's Power of Happiness* (Brown Books Kids; on sale: May 3, 2022). As children continue to return to in-person classroom environments, there's been a notable difference in elevated levels of stress and anxiety. Now more than ever, it is integral that resources be provided to help children as they cope with a new reality in the world around them.

Mara James aims to do just that! *Piggie Bear's Power of Happiness* helps children to develop their Emotional Intelligence (EQ), teaching how to identify complicated feelings such as anxiety, sadness, fear, anger, and uncertainty, while managing them in a healthy way.

Summary: It's presentation day for Piggie Bear, and just in time for Mental Health Awareness Month! At school, every student must prepare a presentation and Piggie Bear intends to deliver one that helps its fellow classmates. While teaching the class how to identify emotions, release extra energy, and perform deep belly breathing and self-hugs, Piggie Bear will guide readers through each feeling with encouragement.

“We are ALL amazing just the way we are! Wouldn't it be great to teach children not to judge others at a young age? The world can be so judgmental, and this needs to change. It can begin with something as simple as a loving friend: Piggie Bear. The more children learn how to process and deal with their emotions, the more resilient they will become.”—Mara James



PIGGIE BEAR'S POWER OF HAPPINESS



PRAISE FOR *PIGGIE BEAR'S POWER OF HAPPINESS*

“I love this book! Through simple verse and lively characters, Piggie Bear’s Power of Happiness helps young children understand a range of everyday emotions. It gives simple yet effective ways for children to embrace their emotions, calm themselves down and feel happy and relaxed.

The illustrations are wonderful! Bravo!”

—**Janan Cain, Award-Winning Author and Illustrator of *The Way I Feel* and *Roonie B. Moonie: Lost and Alone***

“Sweet characters and a gentle tone bring these important SEL lessons to life.”

—**Elizabeth Verdick, Award-Winning Author of the *Toddler Tools*® Series**

“Piggie Bear is a sweet and kind guide to help children navigate emotions and cultivate happiness.”

—**Wendy O’Leary, M.Ed., Certified Mindfulness Meditation Teacher and Award-Winning Author of *Breathing Makes It Better* and *The Monster Parade***

“This book definitely will help children figure out what happiness is all about.”

—**Scott Menchin, Award-Winning Author and Illustrator of *Taking a Bath with the Dog and Other Things that Make Me Happy***





PIGGIE BEAR'S POWER OF HAPPINESS



PRAISE FOR *POWER OF PIGGIE BEAR*

“For children especially, the stigma of homelessness goes straight to their hearts and minds as they live in a world of uncertainty and despair. Piggie Bear plush and the Piggie Bear book explains and shows these children that they are not alone — they have a friend that speaks to them in a safe and comforting language. Piggie Bear is a symbol of a new beginning for the children we serve.”

—Terry Campbell, Illumination Foundation

“This is such a cute and meaningful book. If we can get books like this in children’s hands at a younger age, it can help them deal with their feelings in their later years.”

—Lea Romo, Director of Development, Child Abuse Prevention Center

“*The Power of Piggie Bear* is a wonderful, heartfelt approach to giving children tools for dealing with their feelings and developing self-acceptance.”

—Debbie Hutchinson, Psy.D., MFT

“Piggie Bear is an adorable character that helps teach young children that we are all unique ... Every child should have a Piggie Bear to love.”

—Adrienne Matros, Psy.D.

“Mara James has taken a key principle of developmental psychology and turned it into an easily digestible and entertaining story for young children. Piggie Bear provides a model for young children to begin naming and coping with difficult emotions, which are the central ingredients of mental health.”

—Jessica Borelli, Ph.D, Associate Professor, UC Irvine





PIGGIE BEAR'S POWER OF HAPPINESS



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Originally from New York, **MARA JAMES** relocated to California with her husband and her three children in 2007. They established Dr. James's OB-GYN practice, and for seven years, Mara managed the busy office. Then, in 2014, Mara unexpectedly experienced a manic episode and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Through her battle with mental health, many wellness professionals helped Mara heal and transform her life. Mara's experience — in addition to the experience of some of her close family members — has kindled in her a passion for forwarding the cause of children's mental health. She established the Extraordinary Lives Foundation and created Piggie Bear to promote mental health awareness and provide both children and their parents with the resources they need to pursue holistic wellness in any and all avenues available.

Mara lives with her family in Orange County, California.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

MATTHEW MEW has been working with children's books and materials as an author and illustrator for over 35 years. After graduating from UCLA with a degree in design, he worked for six years as a character illustrator in the Disneyland Creative Services Department. For the past 30 years, he has been a freelancer, designing and illustrating children's products and print media for companies both large and small.



PIGGIE BEAR'S POWER OF HAPPINESS



Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR

1. What would you say the overarching theme is in *Piggie Bear's Power of Happiness*?

The overarching theme of the book is improving children's social and emotional learning. Society puts so much pressure on a child's IQ, but if they don't have a high EQ, they are less likely to live happy and fulfilled lives.

2. Piggie Bear's favorite saying is, "I am amazing," which is something all children should feel. However, there are days when Piggie Bear does not feel amazing, and Piggie Bear gives readers a couple of techniques for handling negative feelings. Can you tell us why you chose breathing and a self-hug as the two exercises to include in this book?

Piggie Bear teaches deep belly breathing because, while most of us learn to take deep breaths to calm ourselves, we might approach this exercise in the wrong way. We can actually experience more anxiety when we breathe into our chests while taking deep breaths. Piggie Bear teaches children to breathe deeply into their bellies, which better calms the nervous system.

It has been proven that hugs can make us happier, reduce stress and fears, may protect against illness and may boost heart health. Therefore, Piggie Bear teaches children about the self-hug, which they can perform all by themselves.

3. Piggie Bear is never identified by gender or by color, nor is Piggie Bear ever identified as a pig or a bear—hence their name. Could you explain the thought process behind not disclosing Piggie Bear's full character identity to the reader?

I wanted children to know that it doesn't matter what gender we are, nor what we look like, because we are ALL amazing just the way we are! Wouldn't it be great to teach children not to judge others at a young age? As a society, we are so judgmental, and this needs to change. This change begins with our powerful and loving friend Piggie Bear.

4. In your opinion, what characteristics set your Piggie Bear books apart from other children's books about emotional learning?

Piggie Bear provides children with a cute, friendly and loving friend that is always there for them. Just the thought of Piggie Bear will bring smiles to children's faces and hearts. As children feel a connection with Piggie Bear while reading this book, they will be more open and accepting. They will remember Piggie Bear's teachings, and they will have a new best friend!



PIGGIE BEAR'S POWER OF HAPPINESS



5. Is there any chance that there are additional sequels in the works for Piggie Bear?

Yes! I have several books in mind. Once our non-profit, the Extraordinary Lives Foundation, raises the funds to illustrate and publish the books, be on the lookout for Piggie Bear's Power of Sleep,

Piggie Bear's Power of Friendship, and many more!

6. There are "power cards" that teachers can use in classrooms as emotional tools for children. Could you tell us what these are and how they can be utilized in lesson planning?

"Piggie Bear's Power Cards" features 44 fun and adorable cards that parents and teachers can use as tools to empower their children, both emotionally and physically. Each card is uniquely designed to help increase children's confidence and self-esteem and encourage daily physical movement. Parents and teachers can use these cards daily and turn them into a fun activity.

7. Tell us a little bit about your foundation of the Extraordinary Lives Foundation (ELF). Was there a particular experience that led you to establishing this nonprofit?

In 2014, at the age of 48, I experienced a severe manic episode out of the blue and was diagnosed as bipolar. Throughout my healing journey, I focused on healing my inner child. I knew that I needed to begin ELF to guide other parents and help them and their young children. I encourage the prevention and early diagnosis of mental challenges in children. I also encourage parents to explore holistic options as well as traditional medicine. The more children can learn about dealing with their emotions, the more resilient they will become. Early diagnosis and the proper treatment for that individual can help avoid self-medication with drugs and alcohol and discourage self-destructive behavior.

8. What does the Extraordinary Lives Foundation do?

Our mission at the Extraordinary Lives Foundation is to improve children's mental health and wellness, and support families by providing educational tools, resources and awareness events. We encourage adults to recognize symptoms, overcome stigmas and reach out for help. Through prevention, early intervention and holistic treatment, we believe many of the big problems facing today's youth can be transformed within a generation.

ELF helps improve the mental health of children and their families in four ways:

- ELF hosts mental health awareness events
- ELF creates therapeutic tools for children
- ELF provides educational resources for parents, parents to be and teachers
- ELF bridges the gap between traditional and holistic healing options.



PIGGIE BEAR'S POWER OF HAPPINESS



Mental health affects people of all ages and in all walks of life. Our multifaceted approach is particularly focused on children but is designed to also reach families and their communities. I am on a mission to help heal and transform the world, one person at a time.

9. How can people help the Extraordinary Lives Foundation?

- 1. Follow us on social media
- 2. Sign up for our email newsletter on our website: www.elfempowers.org
- 3. Purchase Piggie Bear products
- 4. Donate money to help us create more Piggie Bear products so we can give them to vulnerable children that need them the most!



PIGGIE BEAR'S POWER OF HAPPINESS



METADATA & SYNOPSIS PAGE

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AuthorMara James

Illustrator.....Matthew Mew

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MARA JAMES

IS CHANGING THE MENTAL HEALTH NARRATIVE

by Melissa Fales

In 2014, then 48-year-old Mara James was a mother and manager of her husband's busy OB/GYN practice when she experienced a manic episode for the first time in her life. Diagnosed with bipolar disorder, James underwent a long, healing journey. Now, inspired by her own struggles, she's the founder and CEO of the Extraordinary Lives Foundation [ELF] which works to promote mental health awareness for children and their parents. James also developed a mascot for ELF: a stuffed animal named Piggie Bear, who teaches kids about wellness. Piggie Bear is featured in James' debut book, *The Power of Piggie Bear*, available just in time for National Mental Health Awareness month. "At ELF, our goal is for Piggie Bear to be the Smokey Bear of mental health and wellness," says James. "It's time that we ended the stigma associated with mental health."



James experienced troubling symptoms during her episode. "I would wake up in the middle of the night and just start writing," she says. "I'm usually an Excel spreadsheet person, so I was confused as to where all these ideas and words were coming from. It was scary." It wasn't until over a year later, when James had been weaned off her medication and was starting to feel better, that she began thinking about writing a book for children.

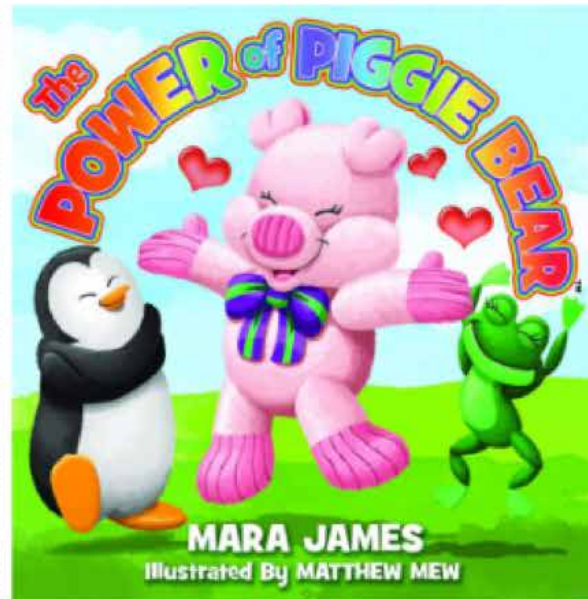
While experiencing the mania, James went shopping and found a stuffed animal she just had to have. That toy was the inspiration for Piggie Bear. "Some people thought he looked like a pig and some thought he looked more like a bear, so he became Piggie Bear," she explains. "I love the idea of using Piggie Bear as a character in a children's book because kids will be able to relate to him no matter their gender, color, weight, and whatever else. Any child can identify with Piggie Bear."

James says she wanted to create a foundation to help provide children and their parents with the resources they need to pursue holistic wellness. Her personal struggles with mental illness, combined with the fact that she raised a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder and ADHD, have made her so passionate about children's wellness. "Holistic healing changed my life," she says. "I created the Extraordinary Lives Foundation because it's basically exactly what I needed, both as a parent and a mental

health patient." James has also established the HUGS for Life Healing Center, a subsidiary of ELF, where healers can apply to become approved HUGS healers. "The idea is to give clients a safe place to find alternative healers," says James. "I'm not aware of anything like it. It's just one more resource we can offer."

ELF is working to improve children's emotional intelligence, or E.Q. as it's sometimes called. "Teachers and parents don't always teach children how to deal with unhappy emotions, but kids need to learn how to manage them," James says. That's where Piggie Bear comes in. "He's basically Mister Rogers reincarnated," says James. "He teaches kids beautiful values like love and compassion and kindness, towards others and towards themselves."

The Power of Piggie Bear is a unique children's book and the first therapeutic tool offered by ELF. "There's not really a story line," says James. "It's much more of an interactive visit with Piggie Bear. It's designed to make readers feel warm and fuzzy inside." Piggie Bear models positive self-care practices and helps children learn to identify what they're feeling, how to calm themselves, the power of using positive words and learning to love and accept themselves. Piggie Bear shows kids how he takes deep, belly breaths when he needs a break and gives himself a big, long hug when he recognizes that he needs one.



James says she wants children to learn these easy stress-relieving techniques, which will serve them well for the rest of their lives. "Science has shown that when you hug someone, even yourself, for at least 20 seconds, your body releases oxytocin," says James. "Imagine waking up and giving yourself a big hug. Then, opening up your arms wide like Piggie Bear and saying, 'I am amazing!' That's starting your day off on the right foot. That's how we want kids to feel in the morning when they're getting ready to face the day."

In addition to the *The Power of Piggie Bear* book, ELF offers a plush Piggie Bear for kids to cuddle with and a deck of Power Cards that feature Piggie Bear's positive affirmations, such as "Say 'I am Kind'" and "Tell someone that they are amazing."

Looking back at all she's overcome and everything she's been able to bring to fruition, James feels it's her life's

purpose to help parents and children access the resources they need while pursuing holistic wellness. "I never understood mental health," says James. "The whole idea of it scared me. But I've come to realize that every time there's a challenge, there's a gift. And the greater the challenge, the greater the gift."

James hopes children will read *The Power of Piggie Bear* and feel that they're armed with the tools they need to manage life's ups and downs. "I want children to know that it doesn't matter what gender we are, nor what we look like, because we are ALL amazing just the way we are," says James. "The more children learn how to process and deal with their emotions, the more resilient they will become."

For more information about Mara James, *The Power of Piggie Bear*, and the Extraordinary Lives Foundation, visit elfempowers.org.

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