

# **The Just Me Project**

## ***For Health Care Professionals***

The faithful caregivers of our nation's sick and disabled live with some very hard truths. One of these truths is that they have few adaptive tools to help sick children and their families talk openly about their feelings, challenges, and fears that can impede healing. The Just Me Project provides some new tools, and uniquely uses the voice and perspective of an animal to engage others.

What made Christopher Reeve a Superman was not the blue cape and the movies he made, but his responses to the challenges of living life as a quadriplegic. Each person with an illness or handicap can either feel like a victim or, they may become a teacher of how they gained high self-esteem. Henry calls each person to be the hero in his or her own story. One oncology nurse used the story to help a boy facing an amputation. He carried the book into the operating room, and in recovery drew pictures of his prosthetics for Henry.

Other nurses have used the materials in rehabilitation, discharge and home care for children with long-term challenges. They have described dramatic changes in the family when they recognize that we are all on the same journey from victim to hero.

*What About Me? I'm Here Too!* addresses the issues of anyone who feels invisible and lost when someone in the family is in need. Too often family members forget that the healthy siblings become at serious risk for many behavioral and health issues when all the attention and resources of a family must be dedicated to the sick member. Almost everyone has been in a situation—at home, at school, or at work—where they feel invisible, unheard, unappreciated, even unloved.

Told through Dolly the dog, *What About Me? I'm Here Too!* speaks of the feelings of confusion, insecurity, and loss as the daily life of attention, walks and treats is taken over by bandages, medicine, and pain. Dolly's owners learn, as does Dolly, that everyone needs to be told they matter and that they are loved, even when time and energy are dedicated to an acute demand.

Henry's lessons accept that hard things happen and give our children, their parents and caregivers a fresh way to engage with others and transform suffering into learning. Caregivers at Head Start or the Navy and Marine Relief Society who have used these materials say that they are especially valuable in normalizing trauma, illness and disability, and thus give the wounded veteran, child or family a new vocabulary to talk about what they are feeling, learning and discovering.

Within the time constraints of care, select what components you find appropriate and adapt them to the needs of your family, class or patient. All materials are designed to supplement, not substitute, care and therapeutic interventions.