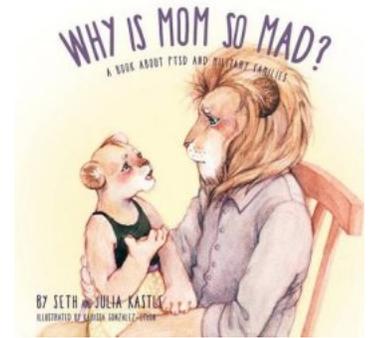


# Why is Mom So Mad?

By Seth and Julia Kastle

In this book a young child who questions why their mom is so mad after returning from overseas where she served in the military. The child's dad helps them understand that even though Mom sometimes gets angry and upset, she still loves her family.



## Discussion and Questions:

- This book draws the reader's attention to certain words by putting them in bold, red letters. Exaggerate these words while reading to a child. Help the child understand the words by asking, "What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?" or "Show me what it means to be \_\_\_\_\_."
- Discuss the character's feelings in the book. Point to the faces and ask children how they think the character is feeling. Provide a feelings-face chart for children to use as needed. After labeling specific feelings, ask children to share times when they experienced specific emotions (angry, sad, happy, etc.).
- Stop after every few pages to ask a who, what, where, when, why, or how question to the child. Repeat the child's answer and elaborate on it if possible.
- If the child is very young, ask where questions and help them point to the pictures to answer the questions.

## Activities:

Ages Birth to 5:

- **Clay Sculpture**
  - Some children may have difficulty expressing what they are feeling with regard to their military caregiver with PTSD. This activity uses art to foster a safe environment in which the child may express those feelings.
  - Give the child clay or playdoh in an assortment of colors. Encourage the child to make a sculpture of something they like or enjoy. Oven-bake or air-dry clay can also be used in order to preserve and display the sculpture.
  - For very young children, encourage caregivers to assist in creating a sculpture in a hand-over-hand manner. This activity can also be done with softer, more malleable materials which may be necessary for young children such as finger paints or ketchup. Using these materials the young child can create a picture instead of a sculpture.
  - Upon finishing, ask older children some of the following questions and write their answers on a piece of paper. Each answer should be written on a new line, like a poem.
    - What would you like to call your sculpture?
    - How do you feel when you look at it? - It's okay if the child lists several feelings. A feelings-face chart can be used to identify emotions.
    - What do you think the sculpture would say if it could talk? - Remind the child that the sculpture can share any feelings it may have.
    - What does your sculpture like?
    - What does it dislike?
    - What would your sculpture do if it could do anything in the world?
  - When finished, read the poem to the child; remind them that they created it with their answers.
  - For younger children, caregivers can narrate what they see and feel in response to the child's creation. Younger children can also be asked questions similar to those above and a caregiver can give ideas and suggestions to help build vocabulary and exposure to language.

- **Mirror Me Activity**

- In families where a military caregiver is living with PTSD, it may be important to try to reattune or strengthen parent-child relationships. This activity can encourage caregivers and children to connect with one another so they can begin reestablishing their relationship. This activity requires attentiveness and engagement, which may be difficult to express in other settings.
- Ask the caregiver and child to stand facing one another.
- Explain to the child and family member that they are going to be copying one another so they look like reflections in a mirror.
- First have the caregiver lead. Explain to the child that they should copy everything their caregiver does.
- Encourage the parent to keep the movements slow and steady so the child can keep up and imitate them.
- After the child copies the caregiver, the roles should be reversed so the child gets the chance to lead their caregiver
- This can be done with younger children by adjusting the amount of explanation given. The caregiver can mimick the baby or toddler's vocalizations and facial expressions.

Ages 3 to 5:

- **Discover A Talking Companion**

- The child in this book went to the dad to ask why the mom was so mad. The father was able to explain the situation in a way that was understandable. It is important for all children, including military children, to know there is someone they can talk to.
- On the first page of the book, the child is talking to the dad. Explain to the child that the child was worried about the mom, and talking to the daddy helped. Point to the dad and child in the picture. Ask the child who they can talk to when they are worried or upset. Offer suggestions if the child has trouble thinking of someone to whom they can talk. Encourage the child to name several people including family members, teachers, friends, and other important people in their life.
- Photographs can be used with children who are nonverbal. Have the child point to people to whom they can talk. Ask them, "Who can you talk to if you are worried or upset?" Allow the child to point independently or help them point while labeling the person's name.

- **Talking About PTSD**

- Some families may need help explaining post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and combat stress to a child. Professionals should understand that some families may choose not to discuss PTSD and combat stress with their children. If requested by the family, professionals can assist them in having this discussion with their children. Some tips are:
  - Use a calm, and comforting tone.
  - Tell the child the story of why the military parent has PTSD, using simple language so as not to create anxiety or fear in the child.
  - For young children, the term PTSD can be confusing. Encourage adults to use simple words to define it.
  - For children over 4, the term PTSD can be used but an initial explanation of it will be needed. Explain that a doctor helped decide that the caregiver has PTSD and now needs help getting better.
  - The positive impact and experiences of the military caregiver should be shared as well as the way the job may have been difficult. Providers should be mindful that not all families will want to discuss the impact of their military experience, be it positive or negative. Families may not be comfortable discussing the impact of military service as their own emotions surrounding them may be unresolved.

- Use descriptive emotion words. For example, talk about how sad, upset, mad, scared, and angry the military caregiver felt. Include positive words too, if appropriate (i.e., proud of their accomplishments, love for their fellow service members, etc.).
- Help the child focus on the positive things about their military caregiver and stress that the caregiver still loves them.
- **Snack Time Conversations**
  - In the book *Why is Mom so Mad?*, the child’s father listens to the concerns and helps the child remember all of the nice things the mom does to help the child feel better. This game can help families openly discuss their thoughts and feelings. It also helps family members focus on positive traits of one another. It encourages children to express themselves and their concerns, but also reminds them that their family loves them.
  - This activity can also be used in a small group or classroom setting.
  - Gather the family or group together to play a game using fruit snacks or other small food item in various colors. If food should not be used, consider using blocks or linking cubes to create a tower or chain instead of eating the snack.
  - Give each person five fruit snacks of five different colors. If necessary, have an adult hold the fruit snacks for the child so they are not eaten until it is time.
  - Explain that they are going to play a sharing game. To eat a fruit snack, they will be asked to share something about themselves with the family. Each color stands for a different prompt.
    - Green: What is a word to describe yourself?
    - Red: What is something you like to do for fun?
    - Purple: What is something you would like to be different?
    - Blue: What is something you worry about?
    - Yellow: What is something you like about the people in your family?
  - Each person picks the color they want to start with when it is their turn.
  - After an individual answers a question, they can eat the fruit snack. The next person can answer the same question and eat that color fruit snack. Or they can pick a different color for a different question. The game ends when everyone’s fruit snacks have been eaten.
  - For children who are less verbal, use a feelings-face chart, books, pictures, and other materials to help them answer the questions.
    - For example, provide a book of children doing many different activities. Ask the child, “What do you like to do for fun?” and prompt the child to point to a picture in the book.