

There is strong scientific evidence supporting the practices and activities we share in the Timbi books, and we are particularly drawn to those that help foster resilience. Read *Timbi Talks* aloud with the child in your care the first few times to be sure they understand the key points of the book. Let the child set the pace on physical closeness—some children need more space than others—and enjoy your time together.

Page by Page Review (Page numbers correspond to the pages in the book.)

(Items 1-4 are adapted from [NACoA's Tools for Kids](#).¹)

1. The affected parent did not choose the disease, but the disease can change how they behave, and their behavior can sometimes be strange or scary. (pp. 2-5, 8-10)
2. The child is not alone in their situation. There are many other children with a parent who struggles with substances. There is comfort in knowing that their situation isn't unique, and there are professionals who understand what they are going through and know how to help. (pp. 6-7)
3. You and other safe adults in the child's life are available to listen and support them. (p. 12)
4. The child did not cause the disease and is not to blame for the parent's behavior or circumstances. [The egocentrism and magical thinking that are developmentally normal](#)² for young children can contribute to a sense that things happening around them are somehow caused by them or by something they did. The adult can point out times when the child makes their own choices to help illustrate that the parent's behavior is separate from the child and is not caused by anything the child does. (p. 13)
5. Timbi labels emotions throughout the books. [Labeling difficult emotions has been shown to diminish their intensity and duration](#).³
6. Children may not yet have the language to fully process challenging experiences and may instead [experience emotional distress through physical symptoms](#).⁴ [Trauma can also make it harder for a child to take in and hold onto new information](#)⁵, which is why Timbi moves slowly, repeats key ideas, and offers simple choices rather than expecting a child to absorb everything at once. This impact often comes not from the addiction itself, but from related experiences like [inconsistent caregiving, conflict, or harsh discipline](#)⁶. Timbi tells them they can learn to listen to their body and be more in control of their reactions: (pp.14-15)
 - o [They can take some deep breaths](#)⁷—the safe adult can explain that slow, deep breathing can help the body calm down. (pp.16-19)
 - o [Sitting on the floor or feeling your feet on the floor can be grounding](#).⁸ helping the child focus on physical sensations in the present moment. (pp.16-19)
 - o The visualizations of the mountain and tree are helpful for children to feel more grounded. Research has shown that exposure to [nature can have calming effects on the nervous system](#).⁹ They are loosely adapted from renowned Buddhist teacher, [Thich Nhat Hanh's Pebble Meditation](#).¹⁰ (pp. 16-19)
 - o [Research shows that play supports brain development and strengthens self-regulation and executive function](#).¹¹ Additionally, [physical activity is shown to have beneficial impacts on mental health](#).¹² However, immediately post-trauma, some children may be too shut down to engage in much physical play. (p. 20)
 - o [Singing is stress-relieving and therapeutic](#).¹³ (p. 21)
 - o [Hugging a pillow or other soft object is a form of self-soothing touch, which research suggests can help reduce the body's stress response](#).¹⁴ (p. 21)
7. The emotions and feelings the child is having are perfectly natural in the circumstances. They are an automatic response to the situation. Emotions themselves are generally fleeting, but rumination can prolong emotional distress. [The child can learn to recognize and interrupt rumination](#).¹⁵ Awareness is the first step. (p. 22)

8. Finally, the child can remember/learn that they are: (p. 23)
 - Good—this is not their fault.
 - Lovable and loved—you are present and there for them.
 - Strong and resilient—acquiring and practicing the skills presented in the book will help.

You'll find a handy list of the skills and tools introduced in the book that the child can practice, fostering a sense of agency or control in their lives at the end of the book.

Janet Hellier, MS MHC

References

- 1 NACoA's Tools for Kids (direct link to the PDF, "four core facts"): https://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Tools_for_Kids.pdf
- 2 Egocentrism and Magical Thinking: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK537095/>
- 3 Labeling emotions (Lieberman et al., 2007): <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17576282/>
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- 5 Trauma & Executive Function (2026 umbrella review; see Abstract): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0149763426002757>
- 6 Pathways from Parental Substance Misuse to Child Trauma (2026; see Abstract): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740925006073>
- 7 Benefit of Deep Breaths (children 6–18; see Abstract): <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11763547/>
- 8 Grounding (2025 review; see Abstract): <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380251343189>
- 9 Being in Nature (2025 review; see Abstract): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272494425002713>
- 10 Pebble Meditation: <https://ncdvtmh.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Thich-Nhat-Hanh-Pebble-Meditation.pdf>
- 11 Playing (AAP clinical report; see Abstract): <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/142/3/e20182058/38649/The-Power-of-Play-A-Pediatric-Role-in-Enhancing?autologincheck=redirected>
- 12 Physical Activity: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36796860/>
- 13 Singing (2024 scoping review; see Abstract): <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/03057356241305921>
- 14 Hugging (see Abstract): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666497621000655>
- 15 Rumination (2024 meta-analysis; see Abstract): <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12017360/>

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Timbi Colors was written to give children, their caregivers, and counselors/teachers a more playful way to reinforce the topics, coping skills, and methods introduced in *Timbi Talks About Addiction*. Some of these will be new to the child and [will be more easily assimilated if multiple sources and senses are engaged](#).¹

Chief among these topics is the concept of neuroplasticity: the brain is more capable of change than formerly believed. This concept is frequently described with the expression ["what fires together, wires together", meaning the encouragement of positive thoughts forges stronger pathways to positivity](#).^{2,3} The converse is also true; dwelling on negative thoughts and situations strengthens those pathways. Therefore, the goal is to introduce as much positivity into the lives and minds of these children as possible.

In *Timbi Colors*, we share the evidence-based 'positive-thinking' practices of visualization, gratitude, experiencing nature, and even smiling and playing! These are explained more fully below. Once learned, these practices become part of the child's toolkit for managing stress and difficult feelings.

And finally, some pages are more for fun — a break from the learning that helps make the book feel less like a 'workbook' and more like a 'funbook.' But as noted in the next section, they still add value.

The following is a brief page by page overview:

- First Spread, pages 2-3: Reintroduce Timbi and reinforce the [four core facts adapted from NACoA](#).⁴ Attempt to engage the child actively in the material by identifying four ways Timbi stays healthy in the rest of the book.
- 2nd Spread, pp 4-5: Timbi hugs his Teddy and he feels better. [Hugging encourages positive thoughts and activates beneficial neurochemicals](#).⁵ On page 5, children are encouraged to think about something that helps them feel better with the goal of facilitating positive thoughts. [A comfort object like Teddy also gives young children a reliable source of security as they face new or stressful moments](#).⁶ [Children who use a transitional object during everyday separations from a caregiver tend to settle and self-soothe more easily](#).⁷
- 3rd Spread, pp 6-7: Reinforcing the child has trusted adults and people who love them.
- 4th Spread, pp 8-9: Timbi misses Daddy and feels sad, but [visualizes a happy place](#).⁸ The active, multi-sensory approach of thinking about, and describing, a "happy place" allows for a richer, more realistic experience of getting away to that place. [Guided imagery like this is a well-established relaxation technique, and research shows it can support children's emotional wellbeing, focus, and coping skills more broadly](#).⁹
- 5th Spread, pp 10-11: When Timbi feels bad, Timbi remembers to be thankful. [Gratitude is another positive emotion that has been studied and shown to improve well-being](#).¹⁰
- 6th Spread, pp 12-13: Timbi knows people who have a parent who is struggling with addiction which [helps Timbi feel less alone and stigmatized](#).¹¹
- 7th Spread, pp 14-15: [Timbi and Sami are playing together and supporting each other, accessing the special neural circuitry for play that enhances self-regulation and aids healing](#).¹²
- 8th Spread, pp 16-17: Something's not right. This is one of the key learnings from Timbi Talks. Children are quite sensitive and pick up on signals of tension and stress very well. They also tend not to have a vocabulary that permits them to express their feelings effectively. As a result, [they tend to manifest their strong emotions in their body, largely unrecognized](#).^{13,14,15} Teaching them to "listen" when their body has something to say (that is, when the body is holding on to emotions/stress) is crucial to allowing them to release them. The drawing of Timbi has some suggestions of how the body might "speak" to someone and encourages the child to circle the symptoms that feel right to them.
- 9th Spread, pp 18-19: Timbi invites the child to take some [deep breaths](#).¹⁶ The next page explores the physical feeling of breathing to enable the child to connect to and stay focused on the breath. This focus prolongs the child's attention, giving the parasympathetic nervous system more time to settle the body.

- 10th Spread, pp 20-21: Timbi is on the swing out in nature. [Being out in nature has cognitive and physiological benefits.](#)¹⁷ The child is then invited to reflect on and draw or write about their favorite outdoor activity.
- 11th Spread, pp 22-23: Timbi talks to the teacher. This is another key message. [The child has access to and can avail themselves of safe adults who reassure them.](#)¹⁸ The child is invited to think about and draw their safe adult.
- 12th Spread, pp 24-25: This spread is showing that drawing or [coloring generally can be relaxing and therapeutic.](#)¹⁹
- 13th Spread, pp 26-67: [Studies have shown that smiling actually makes people happier. The facial muscles send a signal to the brain.](#)²⁰ And smiling is contagious! Smile at someone and chances are very good they will smile back, and everyone feels happier.
- 14th Spread, pp 28-29: Page 28 is more coloring, and page 29 invites a smile-inducing drawing, again, reinforcing positivity in the brain.
- 15th Spread, pp 30-31: These are coloring pages that encourage children to read. [Reading or being read to develops vocabulary and word fluency which lead to greater success at school](#)²¹ and the significant advantages that brings.
- 16th Spread, pp 32-33: We see Timbi's friend Maddie tidying up toys. On the surface it's cleaning up — but it's really about cooperation and reciprocity. [Helping and being helped are both valued here, and when children practice that balance, they strengthen trust and learn the skills that make relationships healthy and lasting.](#)²²
- 17th Spread, pp 34-35: This spread reinforces the key message of goodness, love and resilience.
- 18th Spread, pp 36-37: Recap of learnings and practices outlined in the book. The inside back cover has a handy list of activities Timbi uses to feel better that can be displayed as a reminder.

We thank you for sharing Timbi with a child who is impacted by a loved one's substance abuse. It is our great hope that the concepts and activities shared in the Timbi books will offer children a means to find hope and happiness, both with the help of safe people, and by themselves.

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1 Multi-sensory learning (2024; see Abstract): <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10494820.2024.2427277>

2 Neuroplasticity overview (Simply Psychology): <https://www.simplypsychology.org/brain-plasticity.html>

3 Neuroplasticity, written for & reviewed by kids (Frontiers for Young Minds, 2020): <https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2020.522413>

4 NACoA's Tools for Kids (direct link to the PDF, "four core facts"): https://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Tools_for_Kids.pdf

5 Hugging: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666497621000655>

6 Transitional objects & infant-toddler wellbeing (2025 book chapter): https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89376-6_4

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8 Guided imagery & relaxation for elementary schoolers (2025 RCT; see Abstract): <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12131549/>

9 Visualization (2022, Nature Scientific Reports; see Abstract): <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8770773/>

10 Gratitude (2023, protective factor for young children; see Abst): <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10643-023-01623-3>

11 Children of alcoholics & the value of peer support (prevention/intervention review): <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6826802/>

12 Playing (2025 neurobiology-of-play review; see Abstract): <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12816299/>

13 Trauma in the body: https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Physical_Symptoms_of_Emotional_Distress-Somatic_Symptoms_and_Related_Disorders-124.aspx

14 Trauma & Executive Function (2026 umbrella review; see Abstract): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0149763426002757>

15 Pathways from Parental Substance Misuse to Child Trauma (2026; see Abstract):

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16 Benefit of Deep Breaths (children 6–18; see Abstract): <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11763547/>

17 Being in Nature (2025 review; see Abstract): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272494425002713>

18 Connectedness & Positive Childhood Experiences (2026; see Abstract): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740926000228>

19 Coloring & academic stress reduction in adolescents (2025 study; see Abstract): <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12024132/>

20 Smiling (2022, multi-lab study, ~3,900 participants; see Abstract): <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-022-01458-9>

21 Reading Aloud & Vocabulary Development (2024 RCT; see Abstract): <https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2023.2283475>

22 Peer Trust & Prosocial Behavior in Young Children (2022 study; see Abstract):

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