

SEVEN ESSENTIAL LIFE SKILLS

Skill Building Book Tips

You can read *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* in a way that highlights Taking on Challenges, a Life Skill that promotes Executive Functions. Life is full of stresses and challenges. Children who are willing to **take on challenges** (instead of avoiding them or simply coping with them) do better in school and in life.

TIP:

Mrs. Frisby does a number of very scary things to save her family. Talk with your child about who and what helped her, asking:

- “What did Mrs. Frisby do to face her feat and have the courage to go visit Mr. Ages, to fly on the back of a crow, to visit an owl in the darkness of his tree home, to find the rats of NIMH, and to put sleeping powder into the cat Dragon’s dish?”
- “Think about a time when you tried something that was scary. What helped you do it?”

SKILL:

Mrs. Frisby did more than cope with stress—**she proactively took on things that scared her**. This story can inspire your child to think about his or her own strategies for the skill of Taking on Challenges, a skill that calls on **Executive Functions** of the brain.

TIP:

When Mrs. Frisby was upset, she remembered something her husband had once said to her: “All doors are hard to unlock until you have the key.” Ask your child,

- “What do you think that Mr. Frisby meant by this saying? What did Mrs. Frisby have to figure out in order to save her family?”

SKILL:

Taking on Challenges involves **problem solving**. This back and forth conversation you have with your child is what researchers call “**Take-Turns Talk**.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something and the other responds. The importance of these everyday interactions to brain-building is a key finding from child development research.

TIP:

Mrs. Frisby was able to get help from others because she or her husband had helped them. She freed the crow, who then helped her fly, for example. What other ways did Mrs. or Mr. Frisby help others, who, in turn, helped Mrs. Frisby? On the other hand, the rats—who had been helped by Mr. Frisby—did nothing to help Mrs. Frisby until she came to them.

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH

By Robert C. O’Brien

In this prize-winning book, Mrs. Frisby, a widowed mouse, has to move her family or face almost certain death when the field where they live in the winter is plowed but one child is too sick to move. To save her family, she visits a wise mouse with medicinal potions, flies on the back of a crow, and puts sleeping powder in the bowl of a dangerous cat. She is aided in her escape by highly intelligent rats—escapees from experiments at NIMH—and she, in turn, helps them.



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SKILL:

It usually takes the support and help of others to try difficult things. But receiving help often comes from those you have helped. It is important for children to understand the role that **giving and receiving** help can play in Taking on Challenges.

TIP:

Most of the rats want to leave the comfortable life they have created under the farmer's rosebush because they don't want to live by stealing anymore—a realization they came to when they were at NIMH. Yet, one of the rats, Danner, asks, "What is stealing: Is it stealing when farmers take milk from cows, or eggs from chickens?" Ask your child:

- "When do you think the rats were stealing? Where were they stealing when they took garbage from the markets, tools from the Toy Tinker's truck, or supplies and food from the farmer and his family?"

SKILL:

This book raises complex moral issues, which are important to discuss with your child, especially as you help your child decide what is **morally acceptable** behavior in Taking on Challenges.

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