

Guidelines and Prompts for Clinicians

How to use Ruby's Dad



“

The development of this resource is very timely and exciting – Ruby's Dad is the first of its kind here in New Zealand and will be a useful tool for clinicians. This book will help us make a difference to children like Ruby.

”

RUSSELL WILLS – CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

Ruby's Dad is a children's book about a young girl whose father has a drinking problem. The creation of this book was a joint project between the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) and Skylight (an NGO working with children and families who have experienced loss and grief).

Ruby's story may go some way to giving a voice to children in a similar situation to Ruby and provide a useful way for clinicians to have a conversation with either parents or children about the impact of parental alcohol use. It is available free-of-charge from HPA.

These guidelines provide some thoughts, prompts and parameters to support a safe, effective conversation with adults and children to facilitate a recovery process that includes reducing harm for children. They do not provide a comprehensive, step by step guide on how to engage in a therapeutic conversation about the impact of parental drinking. Rather, we recommend those using these guidelines are skilled and experienced enough to build on the high-level ideas put forward to have an effective therapeutic conversation with their client.

Given the sensitive nature of Ruby's story, it is important that the book is distributed in settings where there is adequate support in place, eg. adult alcohol and drug services, child and adolescent mental health services, counseling or social work settings, primary care, family support agencies, specialists working in schools such as nurses or social workers. In our view, the book is not appropriate for use in classroom settings.

It is important for clinicians to assess whether *Ruby's Dad* is an appropriate resource for their client or their client's family members. It is not a silver bullet, but does provide a vehicle to have a conversation with children impacted by parental addiction or with clients who are parents.

Ways the book can be used

1. As a therapeutic tool to kick start a conversation with parents in clinical settings.

Some potential prompts to use with your client:

“Does this story bring anything up for you?” “If so, can you tell me about that?” “In what ways do you relate to Ruby?” “In what ways do you relate to her dad/or other family members?” “What do you think your son/daughter/children would make of the story?” “If you were to read it to your child/children what kind of things would you expect to come up for you?” “What do you think might come up for your child?” “What was it like for you growing up?”

2. As a therapeutic tool to support parents to read it to their child.

If you encourage this, it is important that you assess your client’s readiness to have this conversation and that there is a reasonable level of stability in the family. The safety of the child is paramount – as such you need to check out whether there are likely to be repercussions for the child or supporting partner if the book is discovered by a parent who is not ready to acknowledge he/she has a problem. It is also crucial that you coach the client so that they are well-prepared to have this conversation and to deal effectively with things that come up for both the child and for the client.

“I can see it will increase the awareness of the impact of their (parents) drinking on their children.”

QUOTE FROM CLINICIAN IN COMMUNITY-BASED
ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG SERVICE

Some ways of preparing your client are:

Make sure they are familiar with the story and have had time to process their own reactions (see above).

Before giving them the book to take home ask some of the following questions, “How would you feel about reading this story to your child?” “Given that talking about how your behavior has hurt your child may be a new experience – how could you make it safe to have this conversation?” “If your child was to get angry how would you deal with that?” “If your child was to deny the impact of your drinking on him/her what would you say?” “Are there things that might stop you reading the book to your child?” “What are those things?” “What are the things that will support you to read this story to your child and to have an honest conversation about how your addiction has impacted on them?” “Are there things you have read in Ruby’s Dad that will help you or make it harder for you?”

3. As a tool for adult children who have a parent with problematic substance use to explore how their parent's addiction has impacted on them.

"How is Ruby's story similar to yours?" "How is Ruby's story different than yours?" "What things came up for you when you read the story?" "What are the things you would have liked to say to your parent?" (if parent now deceased) "What are the things you would like to say to your parent now?" (if your parent is alive). What is likely to happen if you did have that conversation?" "How did you deal with the drinking/other drug use?" "What is different for you now you are an adult?"

4. As a tool for clinicians who specialise in working with children to have a conversation with children 6-11 years old about their parent's problematic substance use.

"Children learn not to talk about mum or dad's drinking. It is important to create safe opportunities that will help them to articulate what is going on for them."

QUOTE FROM AN ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG CLINICIAN IN AN ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMME

Some prompts are:

"How is Ruby's situation like yours?" "How is it different?" "What has it been like for you?" "Are there things you liked about mum/dad's drinking?" "What are the things about your mum/dad's drinking you found tricky?" "Are you ok talking about this stuff?" "Mum/dad's drinking is not your fault – it is up to mum/dad to make changes" "Often families where there is drinking or other drug abuse the children learn to keep secrets – was it like that for you?" "What is going to make you feel safe talking about this stuff?" "What is your biggest concern right now?" "Sometimes when mums or dads have problems with alcohol or other drugs their children feel responsible to help them change – you are not responsible for mum or dad's addiction."

"This book is a useful tool to ask the child how is it for you?"

QUOTE FROM CHILD CLINICIAN

**5. As a tool for partners of clients
(particularly partners of clients in residential
services or family member support groups).**

For partners *Ruby's Dad* can act as an education tool (drinking/drug abuse is no longer a secret in the family) and they can be encouraged to use the book with their children. This needs to be handled carefully with partners well-primed to use the book effectively and safely (see point 2).

6. As a tool in family groups.

It is important to prepare the group on why you are using the resource. Some of the prompts above may be helpful.

“

Ruby's dad is useful for caregivers to understand what might be going on for the child... often the child's behavior is perceived as naughty and there is not a good understanding that the child is being triggered by their experience.

”

QUOTE FROM CHILD CLINICIAN

Call the **Alcohol Drug Helpline**
for confidential information,
advice and support.

0800 787 797

(Seven days a week 10am – 10pm)

Additional copies of *Ruby's Dad* can be
ordered at **alcohol.org.nz** or by phoning
the Health Promotion Agency on

0508 258 258



Ruby's Dad

By Frances Rabone
Illustrations by Ali Teo



Dedication

For Bill

Acknowledgements

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Frances Rabone

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One windy day, Ruby and
her family went to the beach.

“Look at that rainbow!”
Ruby suddenly called out.

“That’s awesome!” said Dad.

Ruby and all her family had lots of good times together.



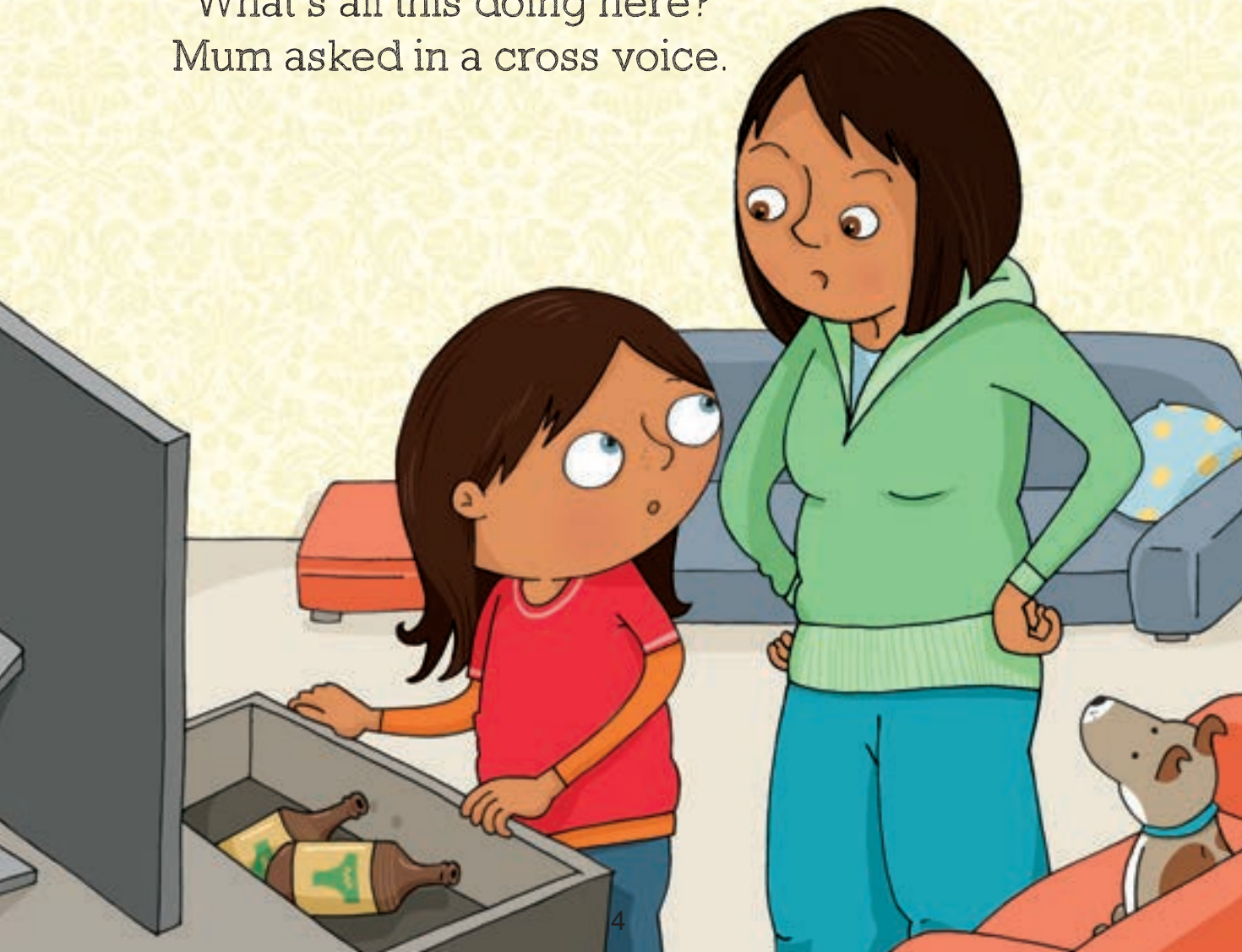
Then slowly things began to change.
Dad started drinking lots of beer and wine.
The house started to feel different.
It started to smell different.



Ruby kept finding empty bottles
in funny places.

She showed Mum.

“What’s all this doing here?”
Mum asked in a cross voice.



Ruby stopped asking her best friend Mia to come round.

She never knew what Dad would be like.

She felt embarrassed when he drank too much.



Some days Dad would be loud and grumpy.

“Go away and leave me alone!”

he’d yell at her.

He smelled awful too.

Ruby felt scared of her Dad sometimes.

She wondered if it was her fault that he got so grumpy.

Other days Dad would come over and hug her.

“How’s my gorgeous girl today? Can you get another beer for me out of the fridge?”
he’d ask.



When Ruby felt all mixed up inside,
she'd go to her bedroom with Tinker,
her dog.





One night Ruby's Mum went out.

Ruby heard Dad coughing loudly.

When she opened the door the room was full of smoke.

"Dad!" she screamed. "There's a fire!"

The couch was in flames.



The kids all ran out of the house and Tinker did too.

Ruby's big sister phoned 111 for help.

Then Dad stumbled out.





The fire-fighters arrived with their sirens roaring.

They quickly put out the fire.

Ruby's big brother was angry.

"Dad!" he shouted. "Our whole house could have burned down!"

"I think my cigarette just burned a hole in the couch," Dad said. "I only had a few drinks. I must have fallen asleep. I guess it's my fault."



When Mum came home she was very angry with Dad.

“You were meant to be looking after the kids!” she shouted.



Later, Mum and Dad started to talk.
They talked for a long time ...



The next day, Dad wasn't there when Ruby got home.

"Where's Dad?" she asked Mum.

"He's gone to stay at a place where people can help him to stop drinking so much. Dad has to learn how to stay sober so he can get well.

Being sober means he'll stop drinking alcohol every day. Like his beer and his wine."



Ruby sat on the front doorstep.

She wondered how her Dad was getting on.

She decided to make a card to send to him.

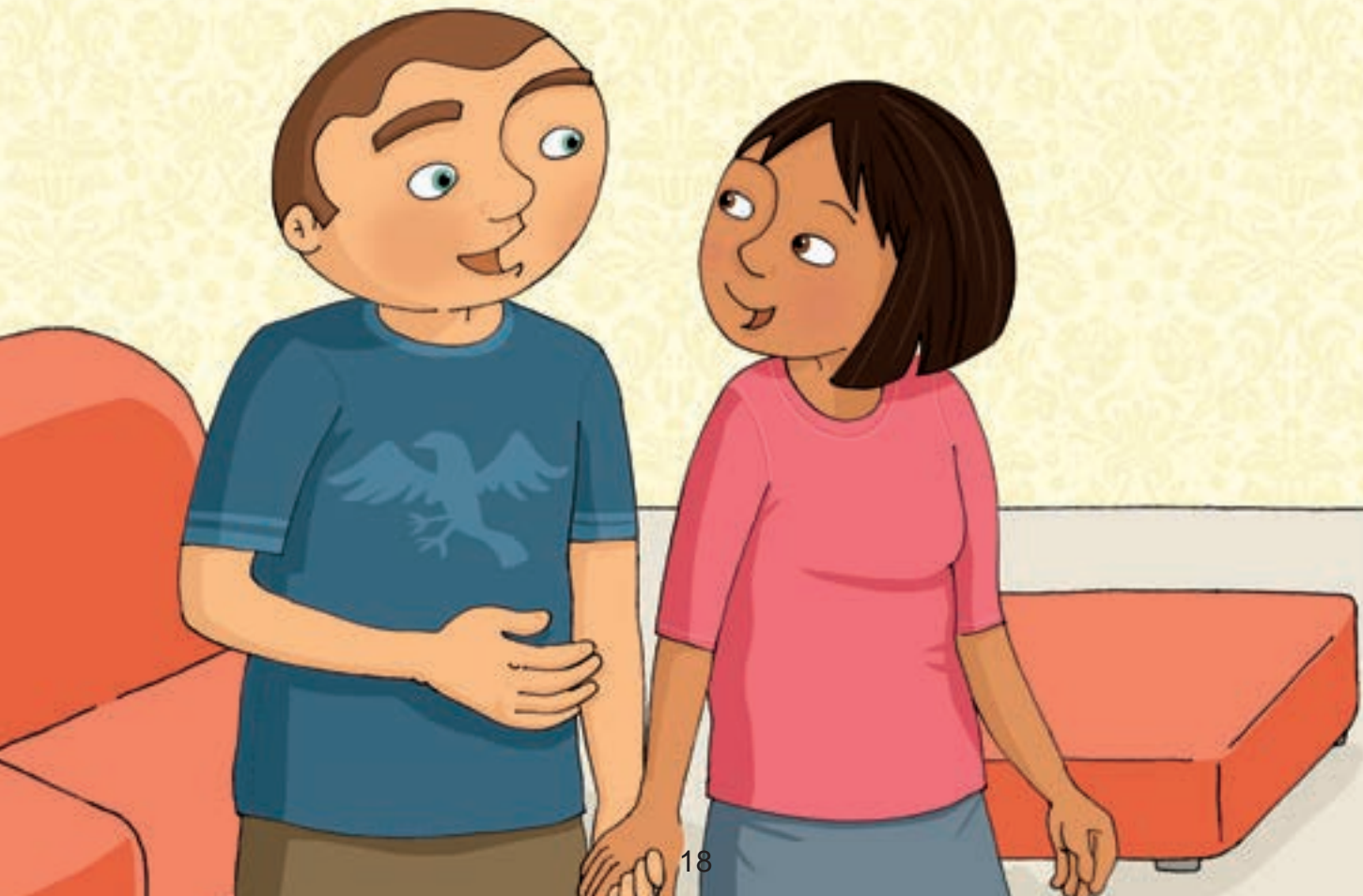


Two months later Dad came home.

“Are you better now?” Ruby’s sister asked.

Dad smiled at them all.

“Well, I’ve found out that I will be OK, as long as I don’t drink any more.”



"You mean no more drinking your beer and wine every day?" asked Ruby.

"No. No more booze for me," said Dad.

"Alcohol is very bad for me. It makes me change into the sort of person I don't like being."



"I'm off to my meeting now," Dad said one night.

Ruby was curious. "What's the meeting for?"

"People come to it if they have a drinking problem, like me."

"We get together to encourage each other to stop drinking and stay sober."

"Do other kids know people who drink too much?" asked Ruby.

"Yes," said Dad. "You're not the only ones. Sometimes kids wonder if it's their fault."

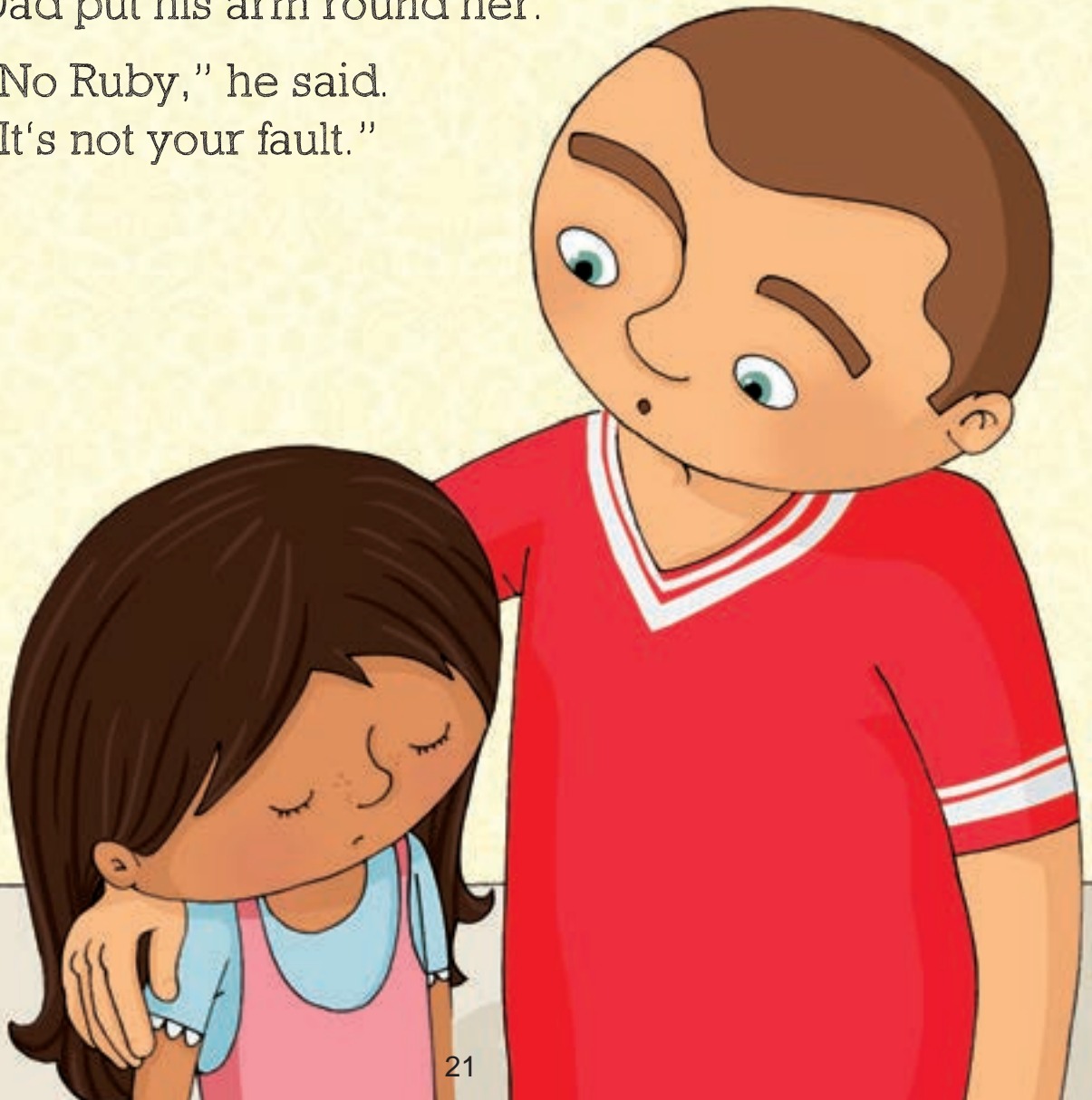


Ruby looked down. "That's what I think sometimes," she said.

Dad put his arm round her.

"No Ruby," he said.

"It's not your fault."



After a while, the house began to feel more like it used to.

“Can Mia come round after school tomorrow?” asked Ruby.

“Yes,” said Mum, smiling.

When Ruby and Mia came home they could hear Dad singing.

“Hi there, girls!” he said.

Ruby liked it when her Dad was happy.



Ruby helped bake a special cake for Dad's birthday.

"Happy Birthday to me!" he sang when he saw the candles.

"Blow them out!" shouted everyone.



“Whooohhhh!” Dad said, as he slipped and held onto a chair. “Good one!”

Dad smelt funny and he was falling around.
Then Ruby’s tummy did a flip.



Ruby went into the kitchen to find Mum.

"I think Dad's been drinking again,"
she told her.

"I think he has too," said Mum.



Everyone hated it when Dad drank.



Dad was really mad with himself.

"I'm so sorry for spoiling everything,"
he said.

"I thought I'd be OK just
having one drink, but
then I couldn't stop."



Ruby looked at him. She didn't know what to say.

"I am going to go back to my meetings again," said Dad. "They help me to remember that I have a drinking problem."





Ruby's family were down at the beach.

"Look at that rainbow!" shouted Ruby.

"It's ages since we saw the last one."

She looked up at her Dad. "I really like it when you're not drinking any more."

"Yeah, me too," said Dad.

"I just have to take one day at a time, because it can be really hard."

"Go for it!" Ruby told him.





Do you, a friend or family member need
help with alcohol?

Call the Alcohol Drug Helpline

0800 787 797

(Open 10am – 10pm)

www.alcoholdrughelp.org.nz

This is a story for children aged 6–11 years whose parent or relative has a drinking problem.

Ruby's Dad begins to drink too much and things begin to change in Ruby's family. After some difficult times, Dad gets the help he needs to stop drinking.

An honest, encouraging story to help children and families talk about alcohol and how it can affect family life.

