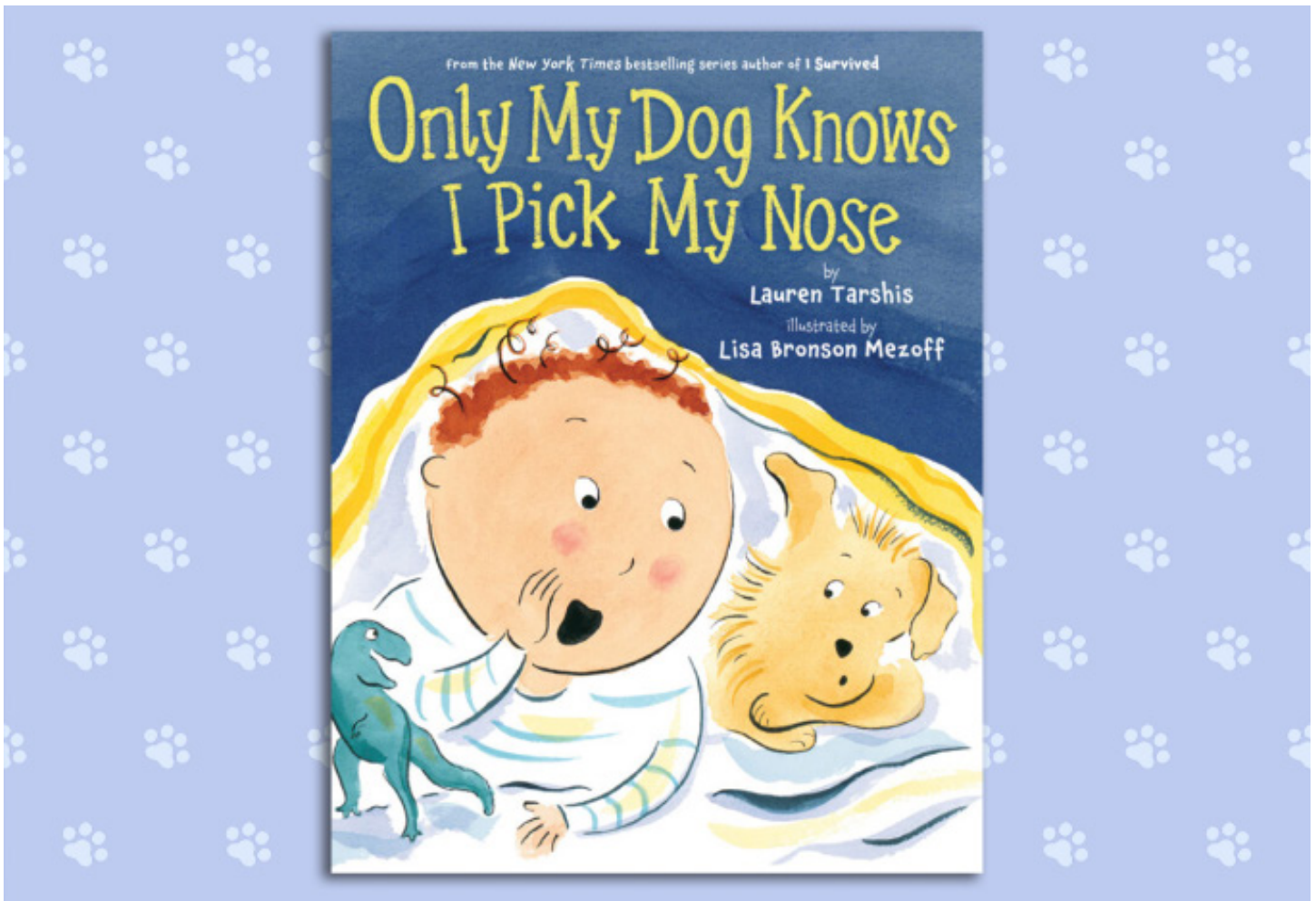


How Lauren Tarshis' New Picture Book Teaches Self-Acceptance

BY SCHOLASTIC PARENTS STAFF

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Lauren Tarshis knows a thing or two about teaching children self-acceptance. The *New York Times* best-selling author of the thrilling *I Survived* series is a mother of four, and with that comes a profound sense of wanting to instill that value in her own children. With self-acceptance comes more confidence and empathy for other people. These emotional skills benefit children in many ways as they grow up.

Self-acceptance also often develops in tandem with the idea of unconditional love, which inspired Tarshis to write the stunning new picture book, *Only My Dog Knows I Pick My Nose*. When she considered just how much her dog, Roy, knew about everyone in her family (and how much he loves them unconditionally!), Tarshis realized she had to share these lessons with young readers.

We chatted with Tarshis to learn more about

her writing process and exactly what went into this lovable new picture book — and how it can teach your own child self-acceptance.

In *Only My Dog Knows I Pick My Nose*, we meet a little boy whose secrets are shared with his loving canine companion. There's the side of him that does everything he's supposed to — behave, eat his vegetables, and so on — and then there's the secret side only his furry best friend knows about. And they're both incredibly loveable sides!

Similarly, Roy knows a lot about Tarshis' family. In fact, she has often joked that he's the only one who knew all of her kids' secrets.

"He knew that my son sang Backstreet Boys songs in the bathroom mirror when he was eight years old," says Tarshis. "He knew that my daughter snuck downstairs at night to snag some of the chocolate my husband hid in his tool cabinet."

During a conversation about picture books with a friend, the title *Only My Dog Knows I Pick My Nose* struck Tarshis as a funny way to describe this phenomenon.

"The story started out as a personal creative project with my close friend Lisa Mezoff, who is an artist and creative director at a digital marketing company," says Tarshis. "She had been developing some ideas for picture books, and we were chatting about this as we were walking one day. I shared an idea that I had been germinating for many years, inspired by my own dog, Roy, and his role in our family."

This led to the idea that dogs in particular love us unconditionally, and know most of our silliest secrets.

How the Book Teaches Valuable Life Lessons

Only My Dog Knows I Pick My Nose explores the concepts of self-love, self-acceptance, and confidence no matter what your silly secrets or perceived "imperfections" might be.

"There's such a focus on social-emotional learning



Lauren Tarshis and Lisa Mezoff with Lauren's dog Roy. PHOTO BY DAVID DREYFUSS

now, on emotional well-being, and the idea that there are certain basic skills that we can teach our kids that help them become more self-aware, more resilient, and more empathetic," says Tarshis. "To me, the idea of unconditional love is one of the most basic elements in emotional health — that those close to us, our family and friends (and of course our doggies), love us despite our foibles. And sharing this message with kids explicitly and directly is so important."

And with the idea of unconditional love and understanding comes the knowledge that even if they goof up sometimes, children will always know that they're loved for who they are.

"Unconditional love doesn't mean unconditional approval of behavior that's hurtful or careless or selfish," says Tarshis. "But we can separate the two. For instance: 'I don't like what you did, and know that next time you'll do better. But I always love you, no matter what.'"

This is especially important for children to understand as they grow and learn from their mistakes. "It is a message that we can help children say to themselves when they have a setback," says Tarshis. "For instance: 'I made a mistake, but I'm still a good person who people love. Next time I'll do better.'"

Use the Book to Start Family Conversations

Having an open dialogue with children when teaching them why self-acceptance is important. The more you take the time to explain and speak to them about this critically important value, the easier it will be.

"I would read the book and then go back and look at each of the vignettes," says Tarshis. "Each one provides an opening to talk about different kinds of behavior and feelings. Many kids have an easier time talking about other peoples' feelings than their own. I think it's possible to have some 'serious' discussions while still appreciating the humor in the book."

Only My Dog Knows I Pick My Nose provides the perfect opportunity to bond and laugh with your children over funny situations in the book.

"It might be fun to do some role playing, to look at the vignette of the boy splashing and making a big mess in the bath or secretly not brushing his teeth and ask, 'What would you do if you were his mommy or daddy and you walked in? What would the boy say back?'" says Tarshis. "It's always helpful to provide kids with models for how to accept responsibility for little

missteps, and to also be kind in delivering feedback."

Tarshis also suggests that parents can share some of their own little secrets, or examples of when they're not as perfect as they might want to appear "For instance, I would have to admit that before a Zoom call, I look at myself ten times with my phone camera to make sure I don't have anything stuck in my teeth," she says. "And when I'm reading a book that's scary, I skip to the end to make sure it has a happy ending."

Reading *Only My Dog Knows I Pick My Nose* with your child will prove to be a special bonding experience that brings you even closer as a family.

"Sharing these slightly embarrassing 'secrets' can be funny," says Tarshis. "But you're also modeling self-accepting behavior — showing that you can admit when you're not perfect and that you can laugh at yourself."

Remembering that we're all constantly learning and changing benefits people of all ages. For children especially, recognizing that we're all striving to be better for ourselves and each other can alleviate a lot of stress, and make them feel more at ease as they grow into confident young adults.