# Calm Heart Heroes

## Companion Guide for Grown-ups

For teachers, schools, parents and therapists

**Auntie Leintje & Ralph (11)**

A companion to Calm Heart Heroes

Ten missions to ride life's waves with a calm heart

For children aged 7–14

## Calm Heart Heroes · Companion Guide for Grown-ups

For teachers, schools, parents and therapists.

A companion to *Calm Heart Heroes: Ten missions to ride life's waves with a calm heart*, by Auntie Leintje & Ralph (11). English children's book ISBN: 978-94-039-5115-7.

Auntie Leintje is Elena Notte, Ralph's mum. Ella, the girl in the story, is Ralph's big sister.

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**You may make copies.** You may freely copy the sheets in the appendices for your own class, group, family or practice. Please contact us for other uses.

**Not therapy.** This guide and the children's book explain how our bodies and feelings work. They offer simple exercises. They are not medical or psychological advice. They do not replace a doctor, psychologist or other helper. Worried about a child? Read Chapter 7.

**Inspiration.** The Deep Heart Move draws on the HeartMath Institute's heart-rhythm exercises, especially the *Quick Coherence®* technique. Ralph learned to ride his heart's waves at Coherence Education.

Illustrations: from the children's book *Calm Heart Heroes*.

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# Welcome, Grown-up

It is good to have you here.

Perhaps you teach and want a quiet moment in a busy classroom. Perhaps you support children at school or work in a school support service. Perhaps you are a therapist who works with children and parents. Or perhaps you are a mum, dad or grandparent who wants to help a child with big feelings. This guide is for you.

*Calm Heart Heroes* is for children aged 7–14. It teaches them that feelings are waves. And that they can learn to ride those waves. This guide is for the grown-up beside the child. It explains why the book exists, the ideas behind it and how to use it together.

You do not need to be a scientist or therapist. Just be curious. And be willing to stop and breathe yourself.

## How to Use This Guide

- Read Chapters 1–4 first, before starting the children's book together. They explain why the book exists, how it works, what the science says and why it starts with you.
- Keep the activity guides in Chapter 5 beside the children's book. There is a basic guide to The Deep Heart Move, then one for each chapter and mission. Use the guide for the chapter you are reading.
- Working with a class or group? Chapter 6 offers short daily practices, a ten-week plan and ways to keep the group safe.
- Worried about a child? Read Chapter 7: When Is More Help Needed?
- At the back are a dictionary, sources and sheets you may copy for your class, group, family or practice.

**References such as "p. 10" mean pages in the children's book.** The page headings and the contents above refer to this guide.

## Three Labels: How Much Do We Know?

The children's book keeps science and imagination apart on purpose. So does this guide. The main claims carry a label to show how strong the evidence is.

| Label | Meaning |
|---|---|
| Supported | Widely accepted and well studied. |

| Label | Meaning |
|---|---|
| Early evidence | Seems possible, but evidence is limited, mixed or mostly from adults. |
| Imagination | A picture in words. It may be useful and beautiful, but it is not a scientific claim. |

Why take this care? Children deserve the truth, even when it is less exciting. It also helps you explain what you do to a child, parent or colleague with a clear heart.

## One Promise We Do Not Make

This book does not cure anything. It is not therapy or treatment. It does not promise to make fear, anger, sleep problems or trouble focusing go away. It aims to give children words for their feelings, a few simple things to practise and a warm grown-up beside them. That matters. Sometimes it is just enough to help them take the next step.

**A child doesn't learn calm from this book. They learn it from you. Breathe first yourself.**



CHAPTER 1

# Why This Book Exists

## It Began with Ralph

*Calm Heart Heroes* began with my son Ralph. He is eleven. We are a Belgian family living in Portugal. We chose Coherence Education, an online school for children who learn at home.

There he learned to ride the waves of his heart. When there is a storm inside, and when life feels calm and happy. He did not want to keep this to himself. All children should get to learn this, he felt. In his words on page 3 of the book:

> *"I want all kids to learn this, because you don't learn much about it at school."*

That is how we began making this book together.

**About Coherence Education.** Coherence Education (coherenceeducation.org) calls its approach "inside-out learning". It starts from the idea that every child is born a genius.

## An Ordinary Morning, One Big Question

The idea came from Ralph. Finding a way to explain it fell to me. "This book started on a normal morning. Two cups of herbal tea. And one big question in my head." That is how Auntie Leintje tells it on page 2.

The question was easy to ask and hard to answer. How could I show children the real power of their heart? How could they use it like a superpower? Not just as a lovely idea. As something they could feel, practise and take to the playground, classroom, kitchen table and bedtime.

This guide is for the grown-ups who want to share that adventure: teachers, school support staff, therapists, parents and grandparents. It explains why the book was written, what lies behind it and how to use it with children. You do not have to be a scientist or therapist.

## Who I Am, and Why It Matters

I am Elena Notte, Ralph's mum. In *Calm Heart Heroes*, I am Auntie Leintje: the woman in a straw hat who whispers from her vegetable garden. I work as an orthomolecular therapist, using the principles of clinical psychoneuroimmunology, or kPNI.

That is a long word for a simple idea. Your thoughts and feelings, nervous system, hormones and immune system do not work in separate rooms. They talk all day.

What you eat, how you sleep, how much you move, the stress you carry and how safe you feel with others all play a part in how your body feels. And it works the other way too.

I trained with kPNI Belgium, which works with the Leo Pruimboom Institute. kPNI brings together research on how the mind, nerves, hormones and immune system affect each other. It also draws on the study of evolution and lifestyle medicine. This approach is used in some medical and allied health training, including in Spain. As a therapist, I work alongside doctors and psychologists, not in their place. "Orthomolecular" means I also look at the building blocks the body needs, such as nutrients.

I also work as a craniosacral therapist and with trauma passed down through families. We look at what travels from one generation to the next. Not only eye colour or curls, but ways of dealing with fear, sadness, tension and closeness. What a grandparent could not work through may still be felt in later generations.

I want to be honest about this. Research on exactly how such patterns pass on is still young. There are signs that parents' painful experiences can affect their children through biology, including during pregnancy, and through parenting, the mood at home and the example adults set. Researchers call this **intergenerational transmission**. It has not been shown in humans that changes in how genes switch on and off—epigenetics—carry these traces through several generations. Studies are small and findings are debated (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018). The best-known studies across generations were in mice.

What is well supported is this: children learn a lot from how their grown-ups deal with stress. Through our example, the mood around them, what is said and what stays unsaid. That is also where hope lies. A pattern that passes on can be passed on more gently. Sometimes it starts with one calm breath from a parent while a child is storming.

## What I See in My Work

Children often know very well that they are meant to "stay calm". They have heard it a hundred times. Knowing is not the same as being able to do it. In a storm, the thinking part of the brain is hardest to reach. Explanations do not get through. What can get through is what a child feels in their body, and what they see and hear from the adult beside them.

## Why the Heart?

Many books on children's stress and feelings start with the head: notice thoughts and learn to think differently. That has value. This book chooses another way in: the body, especially the heart and breath.

**You can feel your heart.** A child can put a hand on their chest and feel a beat. They can notice it speed up after running or a fright, and slow as they settle. Stress and calm become things they can notice.

**Breath is a doorway.** Heart rate, digestion and blood pressure mostly run by themselves. Breathing does too, but we can gently change it. On a slow breath out, the heart slows a little. This is ordinary body science, not magic. For a child, it can be a powerful discovery: I can do something myself.

**The body sends many messages to the brain.** Most fibres in the vagus nerve, which links the brainstem, heart, lungs and belly, carry messages up from the body. A calmer body gives the brain different information. Working through the body is sometimes called "bottom-up". Many helpers, including me, find that breath, closeness and movement reach a child in a storm more easily than explanations. That is experience from practice, not a measured result. It does not replace talking and thinking. It may help make them possible again.

**The heart is also a symbol.** In almost every culture it stands for love, courage and connection. That need not clash with body science. Here the beating heart and the heart as a symbol can sit side by side. We just need to say which one we mean.

## What I Want Children to Take Away

The book has four main messages.

1. **Feelings are waves.** They come and go. They tell you something. Anger, fear and sadness are not wrong. A Storm Wave is allowed to be here.
2. **You can learn to surf.** You cannot always choose the wave. You can practise how to ride it. Managing feelings is a skill that grows, not a trait you either have or lack.
3. **You do not have to surf alone.** Children learn calm first from a calm adult beside them. This is called co-regulation. Asking for help is a brave act, not a weakness.
4. **You can wonder and still ask questions.** The book invites children to dream. It also teaches them to tell a finding from a beautiful picture.

## Honest About Science and Imagination

Each chapter has three layers. The blue "Captain Coherence explains" frame holds things researchers have measured or studied well. The wording is simple and careful: "often", "sometimes", "some researchers call this…". The purple Heart Secret frame makes room for imagination and wonder. It says clearly that this is imagination. Each chapter ends with a Storm line: words to keep for stormy times.

Why this care? Children deserve the truth, even when it is less exciting. Trust is fragile. If a child later finds that one claim is wrong, the whole book should not fall with it. Imagination has value of its own. A picture can comfort, offer words and bring calm. Science and wonder can live together when we say honestly which is speaking.

This guide does the same. For each main claim, I try to show whether it is well supported, based on early evidence or imagination.

## What This Book Is Not

- **Not therapy.** It explains bodies and feelings, with exercises. It can sit alongside support, but cannot replace it. A child carrying something heavy may need a professional. Chapter 7 helps you spot the signs.
- **Not a miracle cure.** Breathing often helps. Not always. The book tells children this too: "Sometimes breathing helps right away. Sometimes it doesn't. That doesn't mean you failed."
- **Not a way to make children quiet or obedient.** Calm is not obedience. A child sent to "go and breathe first" as punishment mostly learns that their feelings are not welcome.
- **Not a way to hide from hard feelings.** Sometimes people use spiritual or positive ideas to avoid real pain: "Just think positively", "Breathe it away", "Everything happens for a reason". This book aims for the opposite. The storm is allowed. We learn to ride it together. If the wave is too big, we get help.

## Why a Companion Guide?

On the last page of the children's book, a yellow frame holds its most important words:

> **A child doesn't learn calm from this book. They learn it from you. Breathe first yourself.**

This is not blame. Nor is it another job on an already full list. It is an invitation. Children tune in to our voice, face, breath and pace. A calm adult is the strongest practice in the book. That is why this guide starts with you.

You do not have to get it right every time. You will have storms too. We are role models, and we have hard moments. What helps a child is seeing how we return: name what happened, breathe again and reconnect.

## About Ralph

Ralph is my son. Without him, this book would not exist. He is eleven. He dreams of becoming an architect and a famous footballer. He loves buildings and making spaces beautiful. He knows almost everything about animals. He is a great cook. His chocolate cake is the best I know.

Ralph is a co-author of the children's book. His own drawings of a Storm Wave and a Harmony Wave are on page 8. In the story, he draws and keeps the dictionary. Ella is real too: she is Ralph's big sister. He felt she deserved the lead role. That made it a true family book.