

Tatty Mouse Learns to Cope

Tatty was a very happy little mouse. His soft fuzzy fur was brown and his tummy was well rounded and squishy. His bright little eyes shone and twinkled when he had an idea. His mother always said that he squeaked too much, but it never worried Tatty Mouse. He loved to squeak and play and spend time in his nest, which was full to the brim with his family. He had lots of friends and they loved to run and play together, and race around the garden when the humans were at school or work. Tatty had a large family, there was Mama and Papa Mouse, two sets of grand Mouses, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, and sisters. His very favourite mouse was his Uncle Whiskers. He liked to talk to Uncle Whiskers about all sorts of mouse business: from building dens to playing with ladybirds, Uncle Whiskers always knew just what to do.

Uncle Whiskers lived in the same nest as Tatty, a small and, at times, cramped place where everyone jumbled on top of each other with busyness and lots of noise and chatter. But at night, everyone would settle down and silence would hold the family tightly as the night tiptoed past.

Tatty never tired of finding something fun to do, he was always very busy. Sometimes, Tatty would creep into the human's kitchen and nibble at the cheese crumbs on the floor. One day, Tatty had crept upon a particularly plentiful supply of cheese when Mrs Lewis bustled into the kitchen, her arms full of bulging shopping bags. Tatty was delighted, as there was a good chance that these bags contained more cheese, maybe some chocolate, but definitely some crumbs of some delicious sort.

"Yum, crumbs", thought Tatty, "yummy, crunchy, toasty crumbs".

"Agggghhhhhhh!" screamed Mrs Lewis at the top of her rather high-pitched voice, "Mouse!"

Tatty froze in fear, the chilling rush of panic ebbed up his tiny limbs and all he could do was freeze to the spot in horror, as he watched Mrs Lewis grab a broom from the corner of the room and lunge toward him. With one almighty burst of energy, dust, and crumbs, Tatty was tumbled over and over, bouncing as he moved along the floor, eventually landing with a bump on the step outside. Before he could catch his breath, Tatty's super mouse powers kicked in and his little legs, which were previously frozen, now moved with sudden urgency, chasing him off the step towards the grass and under a large terracotta plant pot, which Mr Lewis had helpfully placed next to the green house. He looked behind him to see the fuss that ensued. Mrs Lewis was brushing the step as though she was trying to remove the paint from it and Mr Lewis followed behind her with a puzzled look on his face, scratching his head and looking bemused.

Tatty's tummy started to feel odd, like lots of tiny knots were inside, bubbling up and making him feel a little lightheaded. His hands had gone a bit sticky and were now shaking

just enough for him to want to hide them. He felt very strange and wanted to run and cry, but he managed to hold it together until he got back to his nest. He ran to his feathered and pillowed corner of the nest, landed with a cushioned thud, and burst into tears.

The next morning, he went to see Uncle Whiskers and spent a long time talking about the fields and the summer harvest, but eventually Uncle Whiskers, who knew him very well, asked why Tatty needed to talk. Tatty looked at him in surprise, and with one long stream of emotion, Tatty poured out everything that had happened and his confusion with how he felt afterwards.

At last, Uncle Whiskers spoke to him. He told Tatty that this was something that could happen to every mouse; that yes, Tatty had experienced something frightening, but that he had done the right thing to come home and talk about it to someone that Tatty could trust. He explained that the way that Tatty felt afterwards was completely normal and that his body was feeling what his mind was experiencing when he was scared. Tatty mouse felt much better after talking to Uncle Whiskers and decided to be much more careful when he once again ventured back to the kitchen to seek out some crumbs.

This was much sooner than Tatty had planned, as he remembered the large bags of possibilities that Mrs Lewis had been carrying when he was so abruptly chased out of the house. He snuck through an open window and slowly worked his way along the windowsill towards a large fruit bowl left on the side in the kitchen. As he shuffled along, he became aware of the sound of the television from the front room: Mr and Mrs Lewis were watching the news. Good, he thought, he'd be able to get some goodies before they even realised he was there. As he started gathering some large raisins that had spilt onto the side, he became aware of the sound and listened to what they were talking about on the programme. He heard some news of a virus, Coronavirus. They were talking about people getting poorly and some people were dying from it. Everyone had to stay inside and life was changing for everyone. This made Tatty panic, he dropped the raisins and ran back home to his nest.

Everyone at home was talking about the virus, they were saying that he couldn't go out and that he couldn't see his friends. This made Tatty Mouse very worried, he didn't know what was happening and started to feel as he had before, tight little knots of worry started in his tummy, his hands felt sweaty again, and that night he couldn't sleep.

Tatty felt alone, even with the hustle and bustle of the nest. He worried when he heard the adult mice talking and could hear that they were worried too. He tried to look cheerful and talked happily in front of the others, but at night the thoughts would tumble in and he couldn't stop thinking about everything he'd heard during the day.

The adult mice would now gather around the Lewis's TV and watch everything on the news, it was very, very scary. He went to see Uncle Whiskers, maybe he would be able to help. Uncle Whiskers was busy washing his hands. He explained to Tatty that this

was something he could do to help everyone and showed him how to do it properly. This was something that Tatty had always done in a hurry, but now it made him feel good that he knew how to do it properly and that it would help everyone in his nest. He felt better after talking to Uncle Whiskers, talking always helped.

The following week was very busy, lots of adult mice talking and worrying about the virus and work. Now it seemed to be difficult to get basic fruit and nuts, even going to the toilet seemed to be an up hill struggle, as all the mice had stored their supplies away.

The family found ways around getting the things that they needed. They took it in turns to go out to the field, and soon Tatty Mouse found that his new routines became quite fun. He liked being at home in the nest more, and found that he had more time to draw, read, and play different games. He also enjoyed spending time with his family and was able to talk to his friends on the phone. Tatty thought it would be a good idea to make a big drawing of all the lovely things that made him happy at home. On it he put favourite music; Bruno Mouse; his favourite book, *The Gruffalo*; the best choice of TV, *Danger Mouse*; and then his favourite sport, which was football. He couldn't play with his friends yet, but he could practice some skills to show everyone when they got together again.

He found that talking to his friends and family about everything really helped him to control how his body felt, and the worry knots weren't so big anymore, although they were still there when he could hear the news in the background. Uncle Whiskers helped him to understand that the news was really useful for grown-ups to keep in touch with what was going on but explained that it's not a programme for children. So, he suggested that he do something special whilst it was on. Tatty Mouse thought about this and decided that every time he could hear it he would go and do something calming like listen to some music, this always cheered him up and he could dance and think about the fields again.

Tatty Mouse discovered that this time was a special time, one where he could take care of everyone by taking care of himself. From washing his paws, to making sure that he remembered all the things that made him happy, so that when he could feel the knots coming back, he was able to take out his special drawing and choose to do one of those things.

He also found that doing nice things for other people made him very happy and so, one day when he saw Mrs Lewis sitting on the step that brought back painful memories for him, he sang her a song full of happiness and cheer. It was a long way from his nest to the step, so his song was probably lost a little on the breeze, but when Mrs Lewis smiled as she stood up, Tatty Mouse felt sure that she'd heard some of it and knew that he was making a difference.