

Sir Padma vs. the Dinosaur
by Debi H Linton

1. When Padma's Papa met her at school, she was trying not to cry.
“They called me crybaby again today,” she said. “I'm not a crybaby.”
But it's hard to say that convincingly when you're trying not to cry.

2. In the car on the way home, she tried to explain what had happened.
“I haven't been able to start my math homework yet,” she says. “Every time I try, I start crying instead. And when Miss Boardman asks me about it – I start crying.”
Papa didn't ask why she had been crying. He knew that sometimes it just felt that everything was going wrong, and that sometimes doing homework seemed like an impossible task. He drove in silence part of the way home, and then he said,
“You know, it sounds like you have a monster.”

3. “A monster?” Padma looked around into the back of the car, but she didn't see anything. It sounded like one of those things her Papa liked to make up.
“You know,” he said. “Like a dragon.”
“Or a dinosaur?”
“A *T. rex*.”
“A *Spinosaurus*. Those are scarier.” She could imagine it now.
“Right, like a *Spinosaurus*. And every time you try to do your homework, or when someone says something that upsets you, or when you lose something, this *Spinosaurus* comes and makes everything so much worse. I'd cry, too, if I had a monster following me all the time.”
“That doesn't make me feel any better,” Padma told her Papa.
“That's because we haven't figured out how to fight your dinosaur,” he said. “We need a battle plan.”

4. When they got home, Padma and her Papa sat down at the table with her math homework and her pencil case. Padma's Papa also brought some modelling clay.

“The first thing you need to do if you're going into battle,” he said, “is to name your allies. Who can you trust to help you in a bad situation?”

“You and Dad. Miss Boardman, I guess. Calvin, Sparky,” Padma said. Calvin was Padma's best friend. Sparky was her pet dog.

Her Papa wrote all the names down on a piece of paper.

“Now whenever you need help, you can remember there are people to go to.”

5. “The next thing you need,” said Padma's Papa, “is a sword.”

He gave her the clay and she worked it until it was soft, shaping it into a sword that was big enough for her to hold in a hand, even if it wasn't big enough to fight a dinosaur with.

“It's small enough to carry in your bag, and take with you. I know it doesn't look much, but it's a magic sword, and it will give you the strength and the courage you need to fight the dinosaur.”

“Is it really magic?” Padma asked.

“It's as magic as your dinosaur is real.”

“My dinosaur is real,” she said.

6. “Are you still worried, Padma?”

“Yes,” she said, “but I'm feeling a little better.”

“Well, you've been worrying about this for a long time,” said her Papa. “Go and put your favorite song on the stereo and dance to it. Fight the dinosaur a bit if you want.”

Padma was happy to get up from the table. She put on her favorite *Spinosaurus*-fighting music and took her new sword with her.

After only one song of ferocious fighting, she was feeling much better.

7. “And now we're ready to face your enemy.” Padma wasn't sure about *that*, but she didn't say anything. She didn't feel like crying, anyway.
“What's the dinosaur hiding in today? It's always very important to name your enemy.”
“My math homework,” she said.
“Then take your sword, Sir Padma. We're going in!”

8. “What we need,” Padma's Papa said, “is a battle plan. Let's make a list of all the things you need to do your math homework – I mean, to fight this *Spinosaurus*.
Padma looked at her homework, and felt scared again. But she had her magic sword of strength and courage, and she had her Papa, and she started to make a list of all the steps she would need to defeat the dinosaur, one math problem at a time.
By the time she was done, she didn't feel like crying at all. She was ready to do her homework!

9. When Padma's Dad came home from work, he was surprised to find Padma sitting at the table, smiling proudly, and her scary math homework all done.
“How did you get over your fear?” he asked her.
“I fought a *Spinosaurus!*” she told him.
Her Dad was puzzled. But he said “Well done,” anyway.

10. Padma cleared her homework from the table and they all sat down for dinner. After dinner, she was clearing up a glass of water when she tripped over Sparky. The glass fell to the floor and shattered, spilling water everywhere!
Padma stared at the mess, and before she knew what she was doing, she had started crying again. She ran to her room so her Dad and Papa wouldn't see her crying. She couldn't believe it! The dinosaur was back!

11. Padma's Dad came to her room and sat with her on her bed, while she told him all about the dinosaur. It was hard to do, because she was crying.

“But I fought it!” she said. “I thought it would go away!”

Dad had his arm around her shoulders. “Sometimes just fighting a monster doesn't make it go away forever.”

“So do I have to fight it again?”

“Maybe. Or maybe you don't have to fight the dinosaur at all.”

Padma was so surprised she forgot to cry. “Then what else can I do?”

12. Sparky was at Padma's door, to say sorry for the broken glass. Dad let the dog in and the three of them sat on the floor together. Padma stroked Sparky's head to let him know that she had forgiven him.

“Let's close our eyes,” Dad said. “Can you feel yourself breathing? In, out, in and out again.”

“I'm always breathing, Dad,” said Padma, who was trying not to giggle. It felt strange, because she still had tears in her eyes.

“But now imagine you're breathing in happiness every time you breathe in,” her Dad said.

“And every time you're breathing out, you're breathing out sadness and fear and anger and all the bad things.”

It sounded silly to Padma, but when she tried it, she found that she wasn't sobbing when she tried to breathe.

13. “Are you still stroking Sparky?” Dad couldn't see, because he had his eyes shut.

“Yes,” said Padma.

“Now pretend that you're stroking the dinosaur,” Dad said. “Pretend that you're making friends with it.”

“You can't be friends with a *Spinosaurus*, Dad.”

“You can, Sir. Padma.” Dad said. “Don't you have a magic sword? You can do *anything*.”

14. So Padma sat with her dinosaur, and she stroked it, and you know what?

She made friends with it!

“Because,” she explained to her Dads, “sometimes it's OK to cry. And sometimes it's OK to have a *Spinosaurus*.”

“So does that mean you're not going to need your sword?” Her Papa asked.

“No,” Padma said. “Because I'm still going to need to fight it sometimes.”

And sometimes, she still did.

15. A note from the author:

Padma had trouble at school and at home because she was crying a lot. She had what some grown ups call “anxiety”

Padma's Dads gave her a lot of things she could use to deal with her anxiety. If you have trouble crying, then you can use if some of them work for you

IMAGINE your bad feelings are a monster you can fight. Or an animal you can make friends with.

FIND ALLIES: make a list of friends, family or pets who are on your side.

ART: draw, play a musical instrument, or write a story

TOOLS: use a blanket, a toy or a clay sword to store your courage in.

EXERCISE go running, dance to a favorite song or play a sport

MAKE A PLAN: write down every step you need to do the task that's scaring you.

TALK to a friend, family member, or a pet

BREATHE gently, feeling how the air comes in and out of your body. Pretend it is calming you down.

RELAX by stroking a pet, reading a book, having a snack, or taking a nap.

REMEMBER: It is OK to cry sometimes. It is OK to be sad, and the way you deal with that sadness is up to you. The best way will depend on the situation.