

# Anxiety- Free Kids

**FOR  
KIDS  
ONLY**

Companion  
Guide

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(That means she's a psychologist!)

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# Welcome to *Anxiety-Free Kids* and Dr Zucker's "For Kids only" Companion Guide

**W**ELCOME to Dr Zucker's "For Kids Only" Companion Guide to the book *Anxiety-Free Kids!* My name is Dr Bonnie Zucker and I am a type of doctor called a *psychologist*. My job is to work with kids just like you who are having a hard time with worries and fears and help them feel better. The best thing I do to help them is to teach them how to *face their fears*. I'll talk more about this later and explain what it means. Kids usually come to see me once a week, and we talk about what makes them feel scared (it's called *therapy*). During therapy, we try to come up with ways to overcome these fears. Their mum or dad also comes in at the end of the meeting to learn how to help their child deal with being afraid and worrying. We all work together as a team. This book will help you make your own team to help you face your fears.

Your parent (or someone else who cares for you a lot) got this book for you to help you deal with times when you worry or feel scared. Worrying and being scared also is called *anxiety*. When someone has anxiety or feels scared a lot, it is not their fault, and they shouldn't feel embarrassed or ashamed. But, because feeling this way is not all that fun and really can feel bad sometimes, it is a good idea to work on these feelings and make that person better. So this is what this book is all about – helping you to feel better! Feeling better also usually means feeling stronger, and other kids who learn how to deal with their anxiety say that they feel more sure of themselves. By becoming a “master” of your anxiety, you will no longer have to be afraid or worry about bad things happening.

The information in this book is the same information I talk about with kids who meet with me in my office. Maybe you already meet with a psychologist like me, or maybe you don't. Either way, you should feel very proud of yourself for starting this program – helping yourself get better is a very grown-up thing to do!

So, let's get started!

Good luck,

Dr Bonnie Zucker

# Introduction

**B**EFORE we get started, let me tell you a little about how this book works. Your parent (or whoever gave this book to you) is going to be reading their own book that goes along with your book (it's called a *companion book*). The chapters are matched up with one another so that your parent is always reading about the same thing as you. For example, in this book, Chapter 1 is all about anxiety. In your mum or dad's book, their Chapter 1 also is about anxiety.

At the end of each chapter, there are exercises for you and your parent to do together. Sometimes these will involve questions to answer together, or suggestions on what to talk about, or you may be asked to do a short activity. Whatever it is, you will work on it with your parent. Your parent's book will tell them about these

exercises, as well, and your parent will read about ways they can help you complete them. The exercises are very important and often will be fun to do!

Two last things you should know. First, while I realise that many kids are raised by step-parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other loving adults, I will use words like “parents”, “mum” and “dad” to describe the person who is completing this program with you. If you are one of these kids, just know that when you see me talk about your parent, mum or dad, I mean the person who gave you this book. Whoever that person is cares about you a lot and wants to help you overcome your anxiety and feel better. Second, I will use different girls’ and boys’ names throughout the book as examples. This is because both girls and boys have worries and anxiety.

Okay, let’s get started!



## CHAPTER

# 1

# Anxiety

## What It Is and What to Do About It

**W**HEN you are feeling nervous, worried, scared or afraid, this is called *anxiety*, or feeling anxious. The opposite of feeling anxious is feeling relaxed. Everyone – kids and adults – feels nervous from time to time. Sometimes something will happen to make you feel anxious, such as when you are in a shop and you cannot find your mum or dad, when you have to get an injection at the doctor's office or when the electricity goes out and you're alone in your room. Other times, it comes out of the blue, and you just feel nervous for no reason. When this happens, you may start to worry about bad things happening. These worries usually make you feel more scared and nervous. Kids who feel scared or nervous much of the time often begin to feel bad about themselves, and worry about how well they can handle things. When you are not

sure if you are able to handle something, this is called *self-doubt*. It is common to feel this way and you should not feel bad about yourself because you have anxiety and worries.

Anxiety becomes a concern when it starts to cause problems in your everyday life. For example, if your worries are preventing you from going to school, birthday parties, sleepovers or sleeping alone at night, then it is causing a problem. If you get a lot of stomach-aches or headaches, or feel like you don't have the energy to do things, it might be because of anxiety. Also, if you have trouble concentrating at school because you are focusing on your worries, then anxiety is causing a problem for you.

Let me give you some examples of kids who have anxiety:

- ▶ When James was six years old, he was in his backyard helping his father pull weeds from the garden. As he pulled out one very big weed, a garden snake jumped out at him and landed right on his stomach before it fell to the ground and glided away. Even though James was not hurt by the snake at all, after this happened, James became afraid of snakes. He began to worry about seeing another snake. Whenever he was in his backyard, he would be on guard looking for snakes. Sometimes, he would hear an animal moving in the bushes and he would run away, fearing that it was a snake in there. As he grew up, James' fear grew and grew. When he watched a scene from one of the *Harry Potter* movies that had a snake in it, he became very scared, even though the friends he was watching it with were not scared. James even refused to go to his friend's house because his friend had a pet snake. Sometimes James would feel sick to his stomach just thinking of snakes. When he turned twelve, he came to therapy to learn ways to get over his fear of snakes. In therapy, he learned that he had what is called a *phobia* of snakes.
- ▶ Billy was a very smart nine-year-old with a great imagination. He loved to design creative games, and was always



happy when he worked on his games. Even though he was one of the smartest kids in his class, Billy took a very long time to do writing assignments at school because he had a learning disability. Some of his teachers did not understand about his learning disability, and would punish him for not having all of his work done. Sometimes, his teacher even made him stay in from recess to finish his work. This made Billy feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. He started to worry about getting in trouble and having to stay back during recess. He worried so much that his muscles became all tense, he couldn't sleep at night and he even got stomach-aches and headaches. Because he felt so nervous about writing and about getting in trouble if he didn't get all of his work done, Billy would daydream and couldn't focus on his work. He worried so much that it was hard for him to concentrate. Sometimes he would be so worried that he would not want to go to school. Billy came to therapy and learned that he had what is called *generalised anxiety*.

- ▶ Ten-year-old Ruth spent a lot of time worrying that she would get sick. She worried that she would get sick by getting germs from others. Whenever she was at a sleepover or a party, Ruth refused to eat food from bowls that others had touched. She never ate anything homemade, especially homemade biscuits or brownies, or anything from the school canteen. Ruth had a very hard time using public bathrooms; it was so uncomfortable for her, that she often "held it" until she got home. When she did use public bathrooms, she did her best not to touch anything there. She would flush the toilet with her foot so she didn't have to touch the flusher, and she used her sleeve to touch the tap and door handles so she wouldn't have to touch it with her hands. If Ruth accidentally touched anything in the bathroom, even the walls of the stall, she would insist that her mother wash her clothes immediately once they got home. She wanted her

mum to wash everything twice, to make sure the germs were gone. Even though she didn't really know why she was so afraid of germs, sometimes she would become so upset about getting germs on her, that she would stay at home in her room all day. Ruth's parents brought her to therapy and she learned that she had a type of anxiety called *obsessive-compulsive disorder*.



James, Billy and Ruth all had anxiety that caused problems in their lives. All of their worries and fears were very upsetting for them, and got in the way of doing normal, everyday things, like going into the backyard, going to school, using public bathrooms, and even eating homemade biscuits! Their anxiety and fears went past "normal" amounts, which they all learned was why they had to get help for their anxiety problems. All three of them got help and all three of them got over their anxiety. James, Billy and Ruth no longer have problems with anxiety. You'll hear more about them and how they did it later in this book.

Now let me teach you the three parts of anxiety: body, thoughts and behaviour. (See Figure 1.)

Anxiety comes out in three ways: in our bodies, our thoughts and in the way we act (our behaviour). In order to understand anxiety, we need to understand the three parts of it, and we also need to learn how to make each part better. Let's go through each one.

### Body

Our bodies have a reaction when we feel anxious. Different kids have different reactions, but the most common are

- ▶ fast heartbeat
- ▶ sweating, sweaty palms
- ▶ difficulty breathing (shallow, fast breathing)
- ▶ tense muscles