

Anxiety- Free Kids

An Interactive Guide for Parents and Children

BONNIE ZUCKER, Psy.D.

Illustrated by David Parker



Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Welcome to <i>Anxiety-Free Kids</i>	ix
Introduction: How to Use This Book	xiii
A Note for Your Child's Therapist	xv
CHAPTER 1	
Anxiety: What It Is and What to Do About It.	1
CHAPTER 2	
Making Your Team and Team Goals.	25
CHAPTER 3	
Relaxing the Body.	41
CHAPTER 4	
Conquer Your Worries	59
CHAPTER 5	
Changing Your Thoughts.	73
CHAPTER 6	
Changing Your Behaviours: Facing Your Fears.	87
CHAPTER 7	
Keep Facing Your Fears.	97
CHAPTER 8	
Lessons Learned: Celebrate Yourself	109
CHAPTER 9	
Motivating Your Child.	117
CHAPTER 10	
Special Sections	127
References	157
Resources for Parents	159
Appendix A: Overview of the Program	165
Appendix B: Thinking Errors Quick Reference Page.	167
About the Author.	168

Welcome to *Anxiety-Free Kids*

WELCOME to *Anxiety-Free Kids: An Interactive Guide for Parents and Children*. This program features a unique companion-book approach, offering both an information book for parents and a workbook for kids. Congratulations on the selection of this book's program to help your child overcome their anxieties, fears and worrying behaviour. It is a sign of resourcefulness and good parenting to take this step to assist your child in improving their experience in life, including their self-confidence and overall feeling of safety. This program is based on the cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) approach to treating anxiety disorders and it involves teaching strategies and techniques to overcome anxiety. CBT is problem-focused and solution-oriented, and considers anxiety to have three components: physiological reactions, faulty and irrational thoughts, and avoidance or other nervous behaviours. It goes beyond figuring out the *causes* of the anxiety and primarily focuses on how to treat it. CBT is proactive and includes developing a detailed plan for overcoming the three parts of anxiety.

The need for a companion-book approach, including a book for the child and a parallel book for their parent(s), is based on the belief that the most comprehensive approach to treating a child's problem involves integrating the system in which the child lives. The field of psychology calls this a *family systems approach*, and research shows that it is a very effective way of treating the child's problem. By this, I mean that your child can use your help, but your child will do the bulk of the work while you will offer guidance, direction, encouragement and, most importantly, continuous support and praise. In addition, your insights into your child's thoughts and behaviours will be invaluable in helping them complete the necessary steps to overcoming anxiety and feeling better. Although other books may have a "companion" book for the child, no other series to date is designed to be read simultaneously by parent and child. The chapters in each book are paired together and address the same topic; thus, they parallel each other and are to be read separately, but together. It is recommended that you and your child read and discuss one chapter at a time, and that each chapter is fully understood by your child before moving on to the next one. Also, the chapters should be read in order, without skipping any chapters.

Some children also have therapists (psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers or professional counsellors) or may begin seeing a therapist at some point. This program is intended to be all you need to help your child overcome anxiety; but some parents will find that their child requires more than this program. If professional help is sought, this program will be an excellent supplement to your child's work with a therapist, and will guide the therapist on how to treat the anxiety from a CBT perspective. For this reason I have included the section after the introduction entitled "A Note for Your Therapist".

All of the chapters include exercises at the end for you and your child to complete together. Some of these exercises include discussion topics and questions, while others include projects or activities.

These exercises are essential in order to get the most out of the program. Generally, it is recommended that you and your child schedule time together once a week to discuss what you have read and to work on the activities. I encourage you to make these meetings as enjoyable as possible for your child (e.g. they can be outdoors in a park, at a favourite restaurant or followed by a movie). Many children find such one-on-one time with parents quite valuable. If your child sees a therapist, your child should do the exercises with the therapist; you should receive feedback from the therapist about the exercises at each therapy session and review the exercises with your child after the session.

Although the word *parent* is used throughout each book, two parents or caregivers can read the chapters and the child can work with as many adults as desired on the activities/discussion exercises. This book is designed to be read by caretakers – and this includes step-parents, grandparents, foster parents, aunts, uncles and so forth – but for simplicity, I will refer to the reader as “parent”, because this represents the most common situation.

Best of luck,

Dr Bonnie Zucker

Introduction

How to Use This Book

BEFORE we get started, let me tell you a little about how this program works. You and your child will read your respective books at the same time. The chapters are matched up with one another and the content generally is the same, covering the same topics and issues. For example, Chapter 1 in both books is an introduction to anxiety. Your chapters typically will be longer and include additional information on how you can best assist your child through this program.

At the end of each chapter, there is an exercise designed to be completed together by you and your child. The exercises are explained in both books, but your book also contains recommendations on how to complete the exercises and get the most out of them, including how to make it a fun experience for you and your child. The exercises are an integral part of the program and are essential to its success. Appendix A provides an overview of the program in table form and this allows you and your child to check off when each chapter and exercise has been completed.

Your child's book explains that words like *parents*, *mum* and *dad* are used interchangeably to describe who is completing this program with them, yet clarifies that other caring adults can use it too.

Finally, although I would like to think that children will be excited to read this book and be motivated solely by the prospect of feeling better, sometimes a little prompting is necessary. This may involve rewarding your child for each chapter they read or for each exercise the two of you complete. I do not encourage paying your child for reading this book. But I see nothing wrong with rewarding them with a privilege, such as computer time or play time or allowing them to choose a small prize from a “reward treasure chest” (get a box, make a personalised label for it, such as “Brian’s Box of Bonuses”, and fill it with small toys from the two-dollar shop, chewing gum, homemade coupons for renting a movie of their choice and so forth). In the end, the most important thing is that the child reads the chapters and completes the exercises. As always, verbal praise is of utmost importance, and once we get to the exposure phase, your child is going to need a great deal of it.

Okay, let’s get started!

Don't forget!

1. Remind your child to only read one chapter at a time. Read your respective chapters at the same time.
2. Complete the exercise at the end of each chapter together.
3. Use rewards if necessary.

CHAPTER

1

Anxiety

What It Is and What to Do About It

Ten-year-old Kimberly worries a lot. She worries about her homework, her dog, her house and what other kids think about her. Kimberly has a hard time adjusting to unexpected changes. Last week when her mum picked her up from school and told her about her dentist appointment, Kimberly had a meltdown and became very upset because Mum didn't tell her about it the day before. The appointment had to be rescheduled. When doing homework Kimberly often gets very nervous about not having enough time to finish it, even though it usually takes about an hour, and sometimes becomes so stressed that she cannot concentrate or organise her thoughts. She worries that someone will break into her house and possibly kidnap her, and each time she approaches her house, her heart starts to beat fast. For this reason, Kimberly refuses to be the first person to walk into the house and has her mum or dad go in first and check that no one has broken in. Kimberly also checks on her dog many times each day to make sure he is okay and didn't run out of the house. Kimberly gets a lot of stomach-aches and headaches from all of her worrying.

KIMBERLY, and many children like her, suffers from an anxiety disorder. Her childhood is filled with worries and feelings of uneasiness. Kimberly's parents struggle to make her feel calm and comfortable, and feel at a loss of what to do to help her. If your child has anxiety like Kimberly, or has a different type of anxiety, then this book is for you. You and your child will receive guidance on how to become aware of what their anxiety symptoms are and how they can be addressed and overcome in a step-by-step fashion.

In this chapter, your child will learn the following:

1. common symptoms of anxiety
2. how to differentiate normal versus problematic anxiety
3. the three parts of anxiety
4. how to address each of the three parts of anxiety.

These topics will be addressed in this chapter, and the exercise that you will complete with your child after you each read Chapter 1 of your respective books will be reviewed. This chapter also will include descriptions of the different anxiety disorders, an explanation of the cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) approach to treating anxiety disorders, how best to use this program with your child and what to say to them when implementing it, and advice on determining if your child requires professional help and/or medication.

Anxiety: Its Symptoms and Disorders

Anxiety is the experience of feeling nervous, worried, scared or afraid, and it is the opposite of feeling relaxed. All children and adults feel anxious at times. Sometimes anxiety arises as a result of an event, such as when you are driving and almost hit the car in front of you. Sometimes it appears out of the blue. Our capacity for

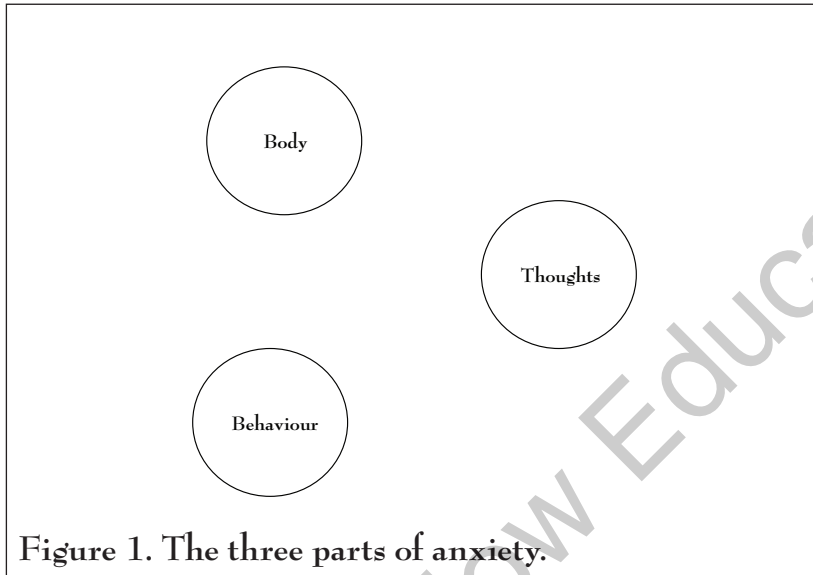


Figure 1. The three parts of anxiety.

anxiety is a survival mechanism that allows us to react quickly in a threatening situation by providing a physical reaction known as the “flight or fight” response. In addition, anxiety can be a motivator and can help us get things done in a timely manner. For example, the anxiety associated with having to pass a test serves as a motivator for studying for it.

Anxiety involves three parts: physiological feelings (body), thoughts and behaviour. Typically, the behaviour associated with anxiety is avoidance. When children and adults avoid anxiety-provoking situations, such avoidance breeds self-doubt. Over time, the repetitive practice of self-doubting impacts and even damages one’s self-esteem.

The diagram in Figure 1 is included in your child’s chapter to help them conceptualise the three parts of anxiety.

In order to understand and treat anxiety, we need to understand and address the three parts. Each part will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters. Common physical (*body*) symptoms of anxiety are: