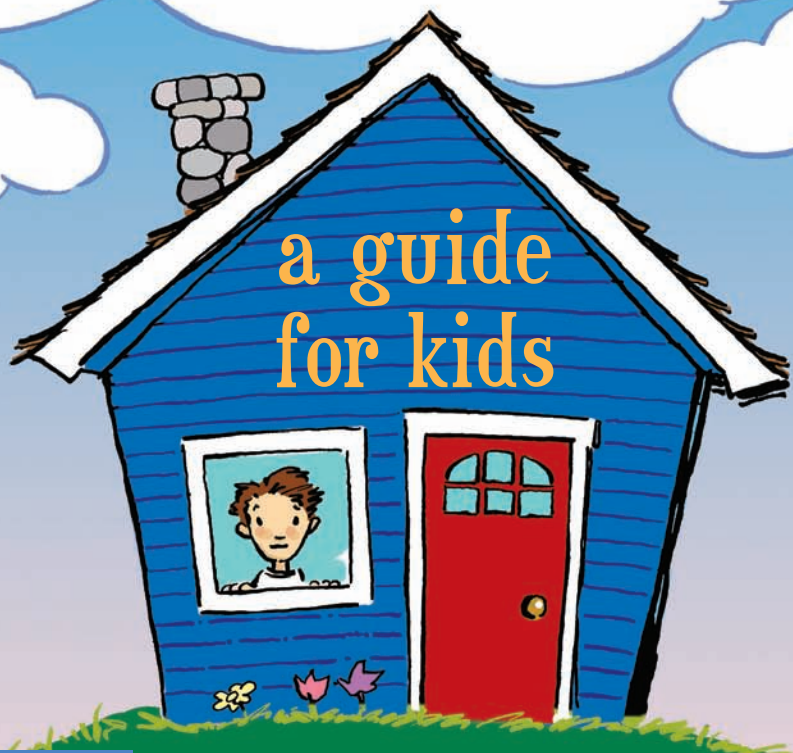


What to Do When You're

Scared & Worried



a guide
for kids

free spirit
PUBLISHING®

James J. Crist Ph.D.

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a guide for kids



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The concepts, ideas, procedures, and suggestions contained in this book are not intended as a substitute for professional help or therapy.

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to all the young people I have worked with who have struggled with fears and worries. I've learned a lot from watching them, and I hope that other kids will have an easier time as a result.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my editors at Free Spirit, Pat Samples and Elizabeth Verdick, for all their help and revisions. Thank you to my niece, Ariel White, for reviewing the initial manuscript. Finally, I would like to thank my coworkers at the Child and Family Counseling Center for all their encouragement and support.

Introduction

This book is all about fears and worries—things that everyone deals with at some point in their lives. Whether you're scared and worried some of the time or most of the time, this book can help.



I wrote this book because I'm a psychologist, and I've seen and worked with lots of kids who were scared and worried. Their fears and worries were making their lives more difficult. And no wonder: it can be hard to sleep, eat, think, concentrate, have fun, or get through the day when fears and worries get in the way.

Being scared and worried often leads to feelings of loneliness—but you're *not* alone. And you don't have to try to handle your fears and worries all by yourself. I encourage you to read this book with someone at home who takes care of you: a family grown-up such as a parent or stepparent, a foster parent, a guardian, a grandparent, or an aunt or uncle. The "Note to Grown-ups" on pages 114–119 offers tips for adults who take care

of you; be sure to show this special section to your adult helper.

You may also need the guidance of an adult who specializes in treating kids who have problems with their worries and fears: a counselor, psychologist, child psychiatrist, therapist, or doctor, for example. That may seem scary to think about, but experts like these can really help. If you're wondering what it's like to get counseling, see chapter 11.

There are many other people out there who can help you as well. You might talk to your teacher, your principal, your best friend's mom or dad, an adult neighbor you trust, or someone at your place of worship. If you want, you can talk to people your own age, too.

At first, talking about what scares or worries you might feel uncomfortable. Maybe you've kept your fears and worries inside for a long time, and you don't know how to tell anyone about them. The best place to start is with a family grown-up. You might say: "I'm scared and worried about something. Can I talk to you about it?" Just getting those words out can be a big relief.



Sneak Preview (What's Inside This Book)

Part 1 of *What to Do When You're Scared & Worried* focuses on fears and worries that most kids have.

- **Chapter 1** discusses what other kids are scared and worried about, and what may be bothering you.
- **Chapter 2** looks at where these fears and worries come from, and how the body and mind work together to make fears worse or better.
- **Chapter 3** has ten “Fear Chasers and Worry Erasers,” or coping skills you can try at home, at school, or anywhere else.
- **Chapter 4** offers more tools, including some written exercises that can help you get a handle on your fears.

Part 2 focuses on bigger worries and fears—ones that are too hard to handle alone. If you have some of the problems described in chapters 5–10, please talk to a family grown-up right away. You may need the help of a counselor or doctor who can identify your problem and suggest solutions.

- **Chapter 5** talks about specific fears called **Phobias**—fears so strong that they're out of control.

- Chapter 6 discusses the fear of being away from parents or other family grown-ups (it's called **Separation Anxiety**).
- Chapter 7 is about **Generalized Anxiety Disorder**, or constant worrying that occurs for more than six months.
- Chapter 8 has information about **Panic Attacks**—when your heart starts racing and you think you might go crazy, or even die.
- Chapter 9 is about OCD, or **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder**, which describes being bothered by the same thoughts over and over, or doing the same actions without being able to stop.
- Chapter 10 talks about **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**, which affects some people who have experienced or seen horrible events like an accident or violence.
- Chapter 11 describes what it's like to go to counseling. If you're having a very hard time getting over your fears and worries, or if you have problems that are too big to handle on your own, you'll learn how an expert can help.

It may help to know that many kids and adults have overcome their fears by using ideas like the ones in this book, and *you* can, too. It may take some practice, but it will be worth it.

I'd like to know whether this book has helped you and how you're coping with your worries. You can also write to me if you have questions or a problem that you don't know how to handle.



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Be sure to send me your address, so I can write back to you. I look forward to hearing from you!

Dr. James J. Crist

Part 1

Getting to Know Your Fears and Worries

Chapter 1

Kinds of Fears and Worries

Lupe, age twelve, worries about not being liked at school. She worries a lot when she's at school, but she can't stop worrying about it even when she's at home. Just thinking about school makes her feel worse.



Salim is nine, and he's scared about spiders falling on him while he sleeps. He thinks they might be crawling across the ceiling of his bedroom at night, and since it's dark he worries because he can't see them. Salim knows it doesn't help to worry, and he hasn't actually seen any spiders, but he can't stop thinking about them. His worries make it very hard for him to fall asleep.



Ten-year-old **Emily** is afraid of thunderstorms. When she sees lightning and hears thunder booming, she runs to her parents. Even her dog gets scared and howls.

All kids have worries and fears. Some kids are afraid of one particular thing, like bugs or dogs or storms. And other kids are afraid of lots of stuff—everything from getting lost to being alone. Worries and fears are normal at any age, even for adults.

As people grow older, some of the fears they had as children go away. For example, many young children are scared of the dark. They worry about monsters in the closet and become frightened when the lights get turned off at bedtime. But as these children grow older, many stop being so scared of the dark. Why do people outgrow some of their fears? Because they learn to understand the difference between a real danger and something that won't actually cause harm. They also learn helpful ways to stay safe.



Still, older kids and teenagers worry about many things, such as:

grades

being popular

world problems like poverty, pollution, and war

leaving home

being rejected by other kids

finding a job

death

finding a boyfriend/girlfriend

scary things on TV or close to home, such as crime or violence

Adults worry, too. You may have overheard some of the grown-ups you know worrying about having enough money or making good decisions about the future. Most parents worry a lot about the health and safety of their kids. Often, grown-ups have the same kinds of fears and worries that young people have: being a victim of violence, losing a loved one, or failing in some way, for example.

No matter how old you are, admitting that you're afraid or worried isn't always easy. For one thing, you might feel embarrassed. You may think you should act "tougher" or that you're "too old" to be scared. But it's okay to have worries and fears! If you pretend that your fears and worries don't exist, it's a lot harder to deal with them—especially if they bother you a lot. For another thing, you might not know how to describe what's upsetting you. This is because worries can be difficult to understand, explain, or talk about.

For example:

- You may know exactly what you're worried about, such as a bully at school or money problems in your family. But you may not feel comfortable talking about these things. (Talking can help, though. Read more about that in chapter 3.)
- You may feel scared and worried, but not know why. Then it can be hard to put your worries into words.
- You may know what you're scared about (a math test) and, at the same time, realize that worrying about it won't help. But you may worry anyway and end up feeling unable to stop.

Sometimes, you may not realize you're scared and worried until your BODY tells you so. You might get a stomachache or feel tension in your neck and shoulders. You can read more about body "messages" like these in chapter 2.

Worries and fears can be very confusing. The good news is that by noticing and understanding your fears and worries, you can learn to handle them.

What Scares or Worries You?

Your fears and worries might feel big or small. They might bother you all day long or just some of the time. Either way, this book can help. But first you have to figure out what those fears and worries are.

On pages 12–13 you'll find a list of many common fears among kids. You can use the list to figure out what scares or worries you. Start by photocopying the pages so you don't have to write in the book. If you make several copies, you can fill out the list again and again as your fears and worries change.

For some kids, working on a list of fears and worries feels scary. For other kids, it's scary to look at the finished list and realize how many fears and worries they actually have. If any of this is true for you, be sure to ask your adult helper for support.

My "Fears and Worries" List



Read the "I'm afraid of" statements first. If you never have that fear, put an X under **NO**. If you have that fear sometimes, put an X under **SOMETIMES**. If you have it almost every day, put an X under **A LOT**.



There are extra lines at the bottom of the list so you can add other fears you have. Once you're done, decide which fear to work on first and circle it. The ideas in chapters 3 and 4 can help you start putting your fears and worries to rest.

I'm afraid of:	NO	SOMETIMES	A LOT
Thunderstorms			
Nightmares			
Getting yelled at			
Getting into fights			
Getting laughed at			
Strangers			
Doctors or dentists			
Making mistakes			
Taking tests			
Being picked last for a team			
Not fitting in at school			
Failing in school			

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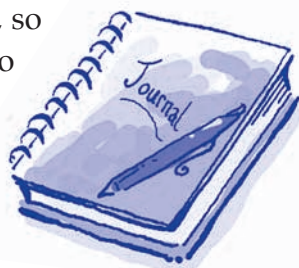
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My "Fears and Worries" List continued




I'm afraid of:	NO	SOMETIMES	A LOT
Wild animals			
Spiders or bugs			
Dogs or cats			
Heights			
Talking in front of people			
Meeting new people			
Enclosed or small spaces			
Clowns			
Ghosts or monsters			
Blood			
Guns or violence			
Loud noises			
Being home alone or away from parents			
War or terrorism			
Something bad happening			
The dark			

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It may be helpful to get a journal or notebook to store your list in, so you'll always know where to find it. You can use this same journal for working on the ideas in chapter 4, or just for writing what you're learning about your worries and fears. Lots of kids use journals as a place to put their private thoughts and feelings.



If you like the idea of keeping a journal, here are other things to write about:

-  How does it feel when you're scared and worried? What goes on in your mind and body?
-  Which fears cause you the most trouble, and why?
-  Who can you talk to about what's bothering you? What might you say? How might this person help?



You may find it helpful to ask other people in your family about their fears and worries. What scares them? How do they deal with those fears? Talk to your mom or dad, your brother or sister, a grandparent, or anyone else you trust. If you want, you can write what you learn in your journal.