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A Note to Parents

We all experience anxiety at some time during our lives when confronted by difficult circumstances, but some children experience anxiety over everyday activities and events and this becomes a constant and pervasive condition. This workbook was designed to help children with generalized anxiety disorder or GAD. Typically children or teens who have GAD experience excessive worry and fear about a number of concerns for a period of at least six months, along with an inability to control their worry. Some of these concerns may relate to real-life situations, such as problems in school, and others may be about unlikely or unrealistic things, like being hit by a meteor. Sometimes worry may be free-floating and not linked to a specific aspect of life. Children may simply feel anxious all of the time for no apparent reason.

Children with anxiety disorders will almost always benefit from seeing a professional counselor. Sometimes this can be for just a few months, and sometimes it can be for a longer period. This will, of course, depend on the seriousness of your child's problem with anxiety.

There are also a variety of medications that can help children with severe anxiety disorders, but these can only be prescribed after a thorough medical and psychological evaluation. Medication does not take the place of counseling, but it can help reduce the symptoms that interfere with a child's day-to-day functioning.

This workbook will provide you with activities that you can do at home that are similar to the ones that your child will learn in counseling. They will also give you insight on how best to help your child.

The activities in this book will teach your child to self-calm in the face of anxiety, identify and get rid of irrational thoughts, develop realistic problem-solving skills, and much more. These new thinking, emotional, and behavioral skills will help your child overcome his current symptoms and develop better ways to cope for years to come.

Children learn emotional intelligence skills just like they learn academic or athletic skills: through practice and encouragement. Your child will likely need your guidance in going through this workbook, and he or she will certainly need your encouragement.

As you help your child, you will probably find out that it is difficult for him to talk about certain issues. Never force your child to talk if he doesn't want to. The best way to get children to open up is to be a good role model. Talk about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences as they relate to each activity, stressing the positive ways that

you cope with problems. Even if your child doesn't say a thing back, your words will have an impact on his behavior.

There is no wrong way to use this workbook to help your child as long as you remain patient and respectful of your child's feelings. If your child is being seen by a counselor for his anxiety disorder, make sure you share this workbook with the therapist. He may have some additional ideas on how best to use the activities.

Anxiety disorders can be very difficult for children as well as their families. Your patience and understanding will make all the difference.

Sincerely,

Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D.

Before You Begin

Hello there, my friend!

My name is Dr. Tim Sisemore, and I work with children who sometimes get nervous and worried. Someone who cares about you has given you this workbook because he or she thinks you would be happier if you worried a little less than you do right now. Most likely, you think so, too.

One reason I really like to work with kids who are anxious (a fancy word for worrying or being nervous) is that they are usually pretty eager to fight their worries and they work hard to do just that. And that means that very often they beat their worries ... or at least get to where they don't worry nearly as much as they used to.

Practice really helps. If you want to be a better piano player, baseball player, singer, or whatever, you have to practice, right? The idea for this book is to give you some activities that let you practice some things that will help you overcome your nervous feeling and thinking. I've tried to make the activities fun, but they still require a little work. Practicing isn't as much fun as winning the game or hearing people clapping after you've given a musical performance. But if you don't practice, you may not enjoy those good endings.

As you begin, imagine how great life would be if you weren't as nervous or worried as you are now. You'd feel better and would have more free time to do things that are a lot more fun than being nervous. That's the goal, and these activities are the "practice" that will get you to that goal. Once you beat the worries, you'll get to enjoy the good feelings for a long time ... the rest of your life!

So, with this exciting goal in mind, let's get started. Soon, when worry comes after you, you will be able to say, "No problem ... I bet I won't fret!"

Assignment: Identify some things you would like to help motivate you in fighting your fears.

Let's face it. We all like to be rewarded. Just about everything we do is done to try to get something we'd like. You might like a new toy or your mom's praise or even just the good feeling of knowing your chores are done for the day.

Fighting worries can be hard work. So adding a reward to the good feeling of beating your worries can help.

In this activity, you are to go through the list of possible rewards and find the five that are most interesting to you. Rank them from 1 to 5, with the number "1" being the reward that you would like the most. Notice that there's a place to put in a reward of your own in case you think of one I missed.

If it's okay with your mom and dad, you should get one reward from this list for each activity in this book that you complete. Finally, talk with your parents and decide on a really great reward to celebrate when you finish the whole "I Bet I Won't Fret" program. Mark it down on the sheet so that you won't forget it.

- ☐ Buy a new book
- ☐ Buy a new CD, DVD, or video
- ☐ Candy: Name your favorite _____
- ☐ Choice of food for meals
- ☐ Computer time
- ☐ Favorite dessert: Name it _____
- ☐ Foods: Name three _____
- ☐ Free time
- ☐ Fruit: Name your favorite
- ☐ Go bowling
- ☐ Go to a ball game
- ☐ Go to the movies

- ☐ Go to the mall or shopping
- ☐ Go outside
- ☐ Have a friend come over
- ☐ Listen to music
- ☐ Money
- ☐ New toy: Name it _____
- ☐ No chores for a day
- ☐ Playdate with a friend
- ☐ Play with a favorite toy
- ☐ Play in the yard
- ☐ Play a favorite sport (shoot baskets, kick a soccer ball, and so forth)
- ☐ Ride a bicycle
- ☐ Snack: Name two favorites _____
- ☐ Spend the night with a friend or relative
- ☐ Stay up later at night
- ☐ Telephone time
- ☐ Time with your mom or dad
- ☐ Time with a friend
- ☐ Trip to a favorite restaurant: Name it _____
- ☐ Trip to a park
- ☐ Trip to a video arcade
- ☐ Video game time: Name your favorite _____
- ☐ Watch a video or DVD
- ☐ Watch a favorite TV show
- ☐ Name one we didn't think of _____
- ☐ And name a really nice one for when you finish the program:

Take Note

It's fun thinking of stuff you'd like to earn for a reward. But remember, one of the best things about doing the activities in this program is how good it's going to feel to beat your worries. You're going to really enjoy trading the time you spend worrying for doing more enjoyable things—and that's going to be your best reward!

Talk with your mom or dad, and work out little rewards for each activity you finish. Perhaps if you do 10 assignments, you'd get a little bigger reward instead of 10 little ones. Figure out your plan, and write it below.

Reward

Number of Activities Required to Get It

Assignment: Learn about another child who worries and see how much you have in common.

You're doing these activities because you believe, or someone who cares about you believes, you worry enough that it bothers you. Our first activity is for you to read about another child who has some of the same things happening. Doing this will help you understand more about how worries work and how you can get over them. It also helps a lot of kids to know that other kids know how they feel. So, reading this story may help you feel better about your worries. In this story you will read about an aardvark. Do you know what that is? It is a cute but funny-looking animal. Have you seen the cartoon of Arthur on TV? He is an aardvark, too.

Read the story two times or have someone else read it to you two times. The first time you read it, just learn about Taylor. Then read it again and think about how much you are like Taylor and how you are different from Taylor. Then tell your mom, dad, or another person who loves you what you learned.

The more we know about worrying, the better we can be at stopping it!

Once upon a time there was a young aardvark named Taylor. Taylor's family was like other aardvark families. They lived in a nice house and had some nice things. They loved Taylor, and Taylor loved them.

Taylor went to kindergarten at Aardvark Elementary School and had some good friends. But Taylor had a problem. Taylor worried and worried about some things.

"What if my mom forgets to pick me up after school? What if there is a tornado? What if I can't learn to read very well? What if I get into trouble and am punished? What if no one will play with me?"

Taylor's friends worried sometimes too. But Taylor worried more than everyone else. One day Taylor asked the teacher, Ms. Green, if she would be mad at him if he didn't color his picture very well. She said, "Taylor, you are really an anxious aardvark!"

"Ms. Green, what does 'anxious' mean?"

Ms. Green replied, "I'm sorry. That's kind of a big word. 'Anxious' means worried about stuff. You worry about what might happen and feel scared that something bad might happen."

"Oh," he said, "then I'm anxious a lot!"

Ms. Green talked to his parents about his worrying (his anxious thinking). They asked him about it, and he was happy they were so interested.

"I worry about a lot of things," he told his mom and dad. "I'm anxious about whether or not you will pick me up on time after school. I'm anxious about school and if Ms. Green thinks I'm smart. I'm anxious that there might be scary things in my closet at night."

He got to use his new word, "anxious," a whole lot that day!

His mom and dad told him that feeling anxious is why he was grumpy some days and why he didn't feel too well sometimes when he went to bed at night. (He didn't know worrying could make you feel funny, but it does!)

His dad took him to see another kind of teacher he called a counselor. He was one of the nicest aardvarks in town! He told Taylor that other children were anxious like he was and he told him some neat things he could do to help him stop worrying and being anxious.

Taylor still worries sometimes, but not very much. His counselor really helped him. So did his mom and dad and Ms. Green. He is really glad he's not so anxious anymore.

Do you worry a lot like Taylor did? Then talk to your parents or teacher. A counselor can help you, too. All you have to do is try the things you talk about. These things help aardvarks ... and they help human kids, too!

Take Note

Describe Taylor in your own words.

What are the things about Taylor that let you know Taylor worries?

What are some ways you are like Taylor?

What are some ways you are not like Taylor?

Write one main thing you learned in this activity about worrying.
