

For Ages
4-7

Worries Are Not Forever

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Illustrated by Marieka Heinlen



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free spirit
PUBLISHING®



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To anyone—young or young at heart—who
has ever felt worried. I hope this book
provides words of comfort for children,
and ways to help for adults.

—E.V.

To my children, Levi and Nora.

—M.H.



The world is a big,
beautiful place.

So much to
see and do!



Honk!
Honk!

Sometimes BIG
feels a little scary.

Tips and Activities for Caregivers and Parents

All children worry—some more than others. Adults may see children’s worries as small or insignificant, but worries and fears are very real for children. If children believe their fears will lead to something bad happening, physical and emotional stress may result. You can read the body language and behaviors that may signal stress. Signs include:

- being tearful or clingy
 - restlessness, agitation, pacing, fidgeting, outbursts, aggression
 - being tired during the day or having difficulty sleeping at night
 - not being able to focus in class
 - a change in appetite
 - avoidance of school, social occasions, or everyday activities
 - biting nails, chewing hair, sucking on shirt sleeves
- Children may not realize that some of their symptoms are the result of worried thoughts. Find out if your child:
- feels tired or worn down most of the day
 - has a faster heartbeat or racing heart
 - often gets “butterflies in the stomach”
 - feels shaky or sweaty
 - has frequent stomachaches or headaches
 - gets a restless feeling or can’t seem to sit still
 - has racing or repetitive thoughts

Getting a child to recognize these signs is a first step in talking about the feelings. A sense of relief will follow . . . but there’s more work to do.

Cutting Worries Down to Size

Worries Are Not Forever aims to give children tools for coping with anxious thoughts and feelings. One of the messages of the book is “You are bigger than your worries.” Children learn that worries are thoughts that can be talked back to.

Together, you can try an activity where your child gives his or her worries a name, such as Worry Bug, Worry Monster, or Sir Worries. What does this character look like? A creepy-crawly? A fuzzy monster? A man with a silly mustache? Help your child bring the character to life in a drawing or by making a puppet, a painted rock creature, or a clay sculpture. This character can be held in the hands and spoken to: “Stop bugging me,” “Goodbye, monster,” “Sir, it’s time for you to go to bed.”

Other ways to “put away worries” include:

Make a worry jar: Decorate a jar and ask your child to write worries on slips of paper to “take out of your head and place into the jar.” You can also use a box or any other container you like. It’s a powerful moment when, later on, a child can remove one of the slips of paper, read about a specific worry, and then tear it up because the problem is gone.



Use a worry timer: Set aside some “worry time.” If your child worries a lot, allow a certain time of the day to be designated for that purpose only. Set the



timer for ten minutes or so. This is the time to let all the worries come out freely. When worry time is over, we “put the worries away for the day.” Follow up with a physical activity or something enjoyable to take the mind off of worry.

Give a worry doll: These are tiny handmade Guatemalan dolls (about an inch in size) created from wool, wire, and leftover textiles. Dressed in traditional Mayan style, the dolls derive from the legend of a Mayan princess who, as a gift from the sun god, could solve any problem a person might worry about. Traditionally, a worry doll was placed under a child’s pillow, so the child could “sleep on the problem” and have his or her sorrows taken away. You can give your child a worry doll or make one together. The doll is a “listener” and “helper” and can be used as a tool to facilitate conversations between you and your child.



Talking About Worries

If a child’s worry alarm goes off, use that signal to play detective:

- What is the worrisome thought? (Write it down.)
- Are there other thoughts lurking around it? (Put them on paper too.)

- Is this thought about something that might happen in the future? How likely is it to really happen? (Talk to the worries. Challenge them. Look for alternative—positive—scenarios.)
- Is the thought about something that already happened? (Talk about the event and the pain it is causing.)
- Seek comfort. (A safe space, or if that’s not possible in the moment, the breathing techniques on page 24 can be used instead.)
- Talk back to the worry. (Use whatever words may be helpful in this situation. Worries are not forever. I am calm. I am safe. I can tame my worries.)

The way that you, as the adult, talk about worry makes a big difference in the lives of the children in your care—so avoid negative language. Hearing “stop” and “don’t” won’t make the worries go away.

Words That DON’T Help



- ⊘ “Stop worrying.”
- ⊘ “There’s nothing to worry about.”
- ⊘ “Don’t be such a worry wart.”
- ⊘ “I’m so tired of hearing about your worrying.”
- ⊘ “Calm down!”