

NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

If you are the parent or caregiver of an anxious child, you know what it's like to be held captive by fear. So does your child. Children who worry too much go to great lengths to avoid frightening situations, unable to shake the fear of what *might* happen. Unfortunately, the more children capitulate to anxiety, the more powerful it becomes. You have undoubtedly seen this pattern and done your best to reverse it, reassuring, distracting, accommodating, and/or encouraging your child, but it doesn't work. None of it. At least, not in the long run. Anxiety can be neither forced nor jollied away.

But there is hope.

What to Do When You Worry Too Much, Second Edition, teaches a new way of thinking about and managing anxiety, one that addresses fear where it begins: in the brain. Your child's brain is alert to potential threat, broadly defined as anything that could hurt, embarrass, lead to uncertainty, or cause unpleasant feelings. Threat

triggers an alarm, which makes it feel like the danger is real. Your child tries to protect themselves. Who wouldn't? You, as an adult, know that the danger isn't real, which puts the ball in your court. What should you do?

If you tell your child that they are safe and push them to move forward, they feel unheard, which increases their sense of threat. If you allow them to avoid what they are afraid of, they assume that you agree, that the danger really is real and cannot be managed. It's a Catch-22.

Fortunately, there is a middle path, one that allows you to emotionally support your anxious child without accommodating their anxiety. The middle path begins with teaching your child about what is happening in their brain, and how to quiet their internal alarm. It continues with empathy, including a clear acknowledgement of how anxious your child feels. Next comes logic, during which you and your child will examine evidence and

think about likelihood. It might be tempting to stop there, but that would be a mistake. To effect lasting change, you need to help your child externalize their anxiety, setting the stage for the most powerful strategies: talking back, doing the opposite, and setting a limit on worry.

What to Do When You Worry Too Much, Second Edition, teaches these cognitive-behavioral skills and more. Your child will benefit most if you work together. Sit comfortably. Read slowly, just one or two chapters at a time. Have your child look at the pictures and do the activities as directed. Help your child practice everything they are learning, first when they are calm, and eventually when they are anxious. Practice is what helps your child develop the brain pathways necessary for lasting change.

Change is likely to happen in fits and starts. That's normal. Re-read the book as needed. Maintain a calm and steady presence. Use humor. Be patient. Remember that even small steps tip the

balance in your child's favor, helping them break free of Worry's hold.

There is often a genetic component to anxiety, which means that if you are the parent of an anxious child, you might be anxious, too. Perhaps you can join your child in using the strategies presented here; all work as well with adults as they do with children. If, however, you find yourself struggling to remain calm in the face of your child's feelings, or if anxiety is significantly interfering in your child's life, please seek support from a mental health professional.

Whether you are using this book on your own or in the context of therapy, maintain faith in your child's ability to take back control from Worry. Project an air of confidence. Anxiety is uncomfortable, but your child is not in danger. They are capable of responding differently, and so are you. Together, you can move toward the day when you will be able to say that your child *used* to worry too much, but not anymore. Won't that feel good?

CHAPTER 1

Are You Growing Worries?



Most things grow when you tend to them.

Have you ever planted a tomato seed?

If you cover your seed with soil, water it, and make sure it gets plenty of sunlight, a little green shoot will appear.

If you check the soil and add water when it is dry, the green shoot will turn into a stalk with leaves and flowers.

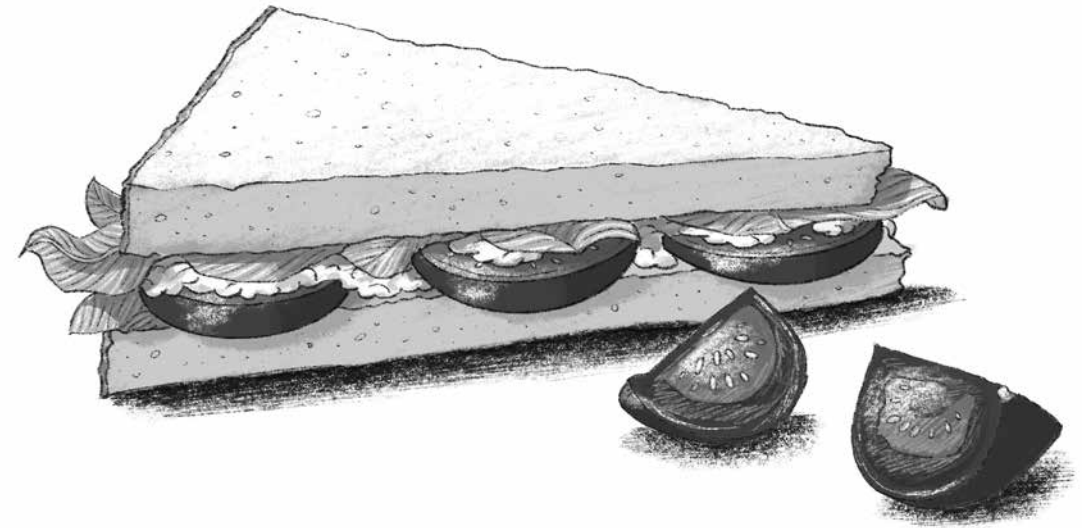


And then one day, a tomato will appear.

If you keep tending to your plant, more and more tomatoes will appear.

Soon you will have so many tomatoes you'll need to look up how to make tomato sauce and tomato soup.

Tomatoes will appear in your salad and next to your tuna fish.



You will find a tomato sandwich in your lunch bag and tomato juice for a snack.

Eventually, there will be so many tomatoes your mom or dad will suggest chopping them up to make tomato ice cream and tomato cookies!

All those tomatoes will have come from one little seed that you planted and tended every day.