

Sissy Goff *MEd, LPC-MHSP*

RAISING WORRY-FREE GIRLS



*HELPING YOUR DAUGHTER FEEL
BRAVER, STRONGER, and
SMARTER in an ANXIOUS WORLD*

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For my mom.

Thank you for being the brave, strong, smart woman
you truly are and have inspired me to be.

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Foreword

Growing up, I was a worrier. I worried that my parents would die. I worried that my dog would get hit by a car. I worried that I worried too much. I was that kid. But I muscled my way through it. And then as an adult, by the grace of God, I found an incredible therapist who helped me finally get past my worry. And now I travel the world, writing books and speaking on stages, helping other people overcome their worries.

So you can imagine my fear when I walked into my daughter's bedroom a few years back and found her crying because she was worried that I would die. The thing was, I wasn't sick. I was perfectly healthy. In the months that followed, my child's worry grew, and we knew we needed help. Enter Sissy Goff.

After two appointments with Sissy, my kid was a completely different human being. What in the world had happened?

I'll tell you exactly what my daughter told me: "I realized I'm more brave than I am afraid. So even though I'm afraid sometimes, I'm brave most of the time."

That's it. Identifying that singular truth propelled her worry into the abyss and began her healing. And now, five years later, I marvel at the strength and bravery of my former worrier.

Foreword

This book is a gold mine—a true gold mine of tools that will help us begin to wage war against this epidemic of worry that is sweeping the world. But not just tools for your girl. Tools for YOU. So read it, and begin to feel the breath of hope fill your lungs like you haven't felt in a very long time.

Your kid's worry is about to be defeated.

—Carlos Whittaker, author of *Kill the Spider*

Introduction

You've found your way to this book, which means you're likely worried about a child you love. Maybe your third-grade daughter is a constant worrier. She asks what-if question after what-if question. Maybe you've heard talk among your friends about anxiety and felt like it possibly describes your middle schooler. Maybe you've read about the looping thoughts that often characterize anxiety and have noticed that your granddaughter gets stuck on certain thoughts regularly. Maybe transitions are hard for one of your kids. Maybe your daughter gets angry often, and there seems to be more to it than typical teenage stubbornness. Maybe you just really want your daughter to discover the bravery and strength you know God has placed inside of her.

Whatever the situation is, I'm glad you picked up this book.

I'm glad for several reasons. For starters, we are clearly living in an anxious world. Worry has woven its way through the generations and has profoundly impacted the lives of the kids we love. In fact, anxiety is a childhood epidemic in America today. I've been counseling children and teenagers for more than twenty-five years, and I've never seen anything sweep the lives of kids like worry and anxiety have in the last few years. When I first started counseling, probably one out of every twenty kids coming in was dealing with

anxiety. Now, at least sixteen of every twenty new appointments are for that reason. It truly is an epidemic.

And because anxiety is an epidemic among children, it's also an epidemic among parents. Yes, anxiety does have a genetic component, which we'll discuss in a later chapter. We'll also learn about the worry continuum and how all of us fall somewhere along it. But I sit with parents every day who are consumed with worry because their daughter is consumed with worry.

I would guess you feel something along those lines too. You don't know how to help. You feel lost. And it seems like the things you do often make matters worse.

I truly believe the advice and insights in this book can make a difference. Along the way, you'll find tips and tricks to help your daughter work through her worries and find her voice, to help her fight anxiety so that it no longer has power over her. But here's a warning: Good counseling makes you uncomfortable, and this book most likely will too. The primary focus will be on your child, but we're going to talk about you too.

If you were to bring your child to my office for counseling, I'd spend time with her, as well as you. I'd want you to learn the tools she finds that help so that you can remind and prompt her when worried thoughts come. But we'd also talk some about you—if there's a history of anxiety in your family, if you've struggled with it yourself. Research shows that one of the biggest predictors of anxiety in kids is anxiety in parents. It perpetuates for several reasons, one of which is that *our* fear sometimes gets in the way of them doing what they need to do to work through *their* fear.

Our goal is for the child you love to know that she is smart, capable, brave, strong, and resilient. We want her to grow in her grit.

Growth often involves struggle. It can hurt to see your child face challenges, so her growing pains may feel more painful to you than to her. What I've experienced in my office is that it is sometimes the best-intentioned, most loving, most caring parents who have the hardest time in the struggle. The journey is hers. But it's yours too. I promise you'll all come out stronger for it. And braver.

Because the journey is one that you will both take, the main sections and chapters of this book mirror those in a companion activity book for elementary-aged girls called *Braver, Stronger, Smarter*. This book and hers start by establishing a foundational **understanding** of anxiety and how all of us deal with it to some degree. We want to be aware of the differences between fear, worry, and anxiety and of what might be impacting the girl you love. Then we'll talk about **help**. It's what parents ask for the most in my office.

“What can I do to help?”

“Can you give her tools to work through the anxiety?”

“What are some coping strategies that she can use now but also down the road, if things get tough again?”

Although anxiety is the most common disorder in childhood, it's also the most treatable, according to Dr. Tamar Chansky of worrywisekids.org.¹ So there is a lot of good news. We'll talk about a variety of skills she can use for the rest of her life when anxiety-provoking situations come up. And finally, we'll move to what I consider the most important section of each book: **hope**. There is great research and material about using cognitive, emotional, and practical perspectives to combat anxiety. But there is not much available that talks about how to work through worry from the place I believe makes the most profound difference: our faith in God. In that final section on hope, we'll look at John 16:33:

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

In this world, you and I will indeed have trouble. Our girls will face it too. But in the midst of those troubles, we can take heart because God has overcome the world. We want our girls to have a faith in God that not only informs their decisions but informs their hearts. We want their spiritual lives to be the ballast that anchors them when emotions toss them about. As a counselor, however, I

would say that is happening to a lesser and lesser degree among kids than ever before.

Which reminds me, I haven't really introduced myself properly yet. I mentioned that I've been counseling kids and their families for over twenty-five years. Along with my dear friends Melissa Trevathan and David Thomas, I've also written a handful of parenting books and have the privilege of speaking to parents all over the country under the banner of Raising Boys and Girls. Our website is anchored with the words: "Parenting is a challenging, delightful, heart-wrenching journey that can feel profoundly overwhelming and lonely at times. Parents need guides who understand the world of their children."²

Parenting a child who struggles with anxiety is particularly challenging and heart-wrenching. But it can also be delightful and empowering and hopeful—for the child you love *and* for you. I'm honored to be a part of your journey. And I'm looking forward to us growing together.

SECTION 1



UNDERSTANDING

1. Defining Worry

What I am about to say may sound a little crazy.

But think back to times when you have driven over a bridge. Perhaps you were in the car by yourself. Maybe having a bit of a stressful day . . . but maybe not. As you drive across, though, a flash of a thought hits. *If I turned my wheel just a little bit to the right, I could crash over the edge.*

Please tell me I'm not the only one who has thoughts like this come out of the blue. For you, they may involve imagining a plane crash or some other scary situation. It doesn't mean we're crazy or suicidal. It's usually just a moment that passes, and we go on with our day, never giving it another thought.

Here's the thing. We all have random flashes of troubling thoughts sometimes. In fact, the average person has dozens, maybe even hundreds, of what we call *intrusive thoughts* per day.¹ As an adult, I know I can say them out loud, hoping—assuming—that you've had them too. And so I don't really feel crazy. Or alone.

Kids, however, are different. Especially girls, I believe.

By nature, girls want to please. Girls define themselves against a backdrop of relationship. Feeling known and loved is crucial. So to say something that might sound crazy or weird, or might make others reject them, can feel like a terrible risk. *You might not like me anymore*, they think. *Even more than that, you might not love me. You might think I'm crazy. Maybe I am. . . .*

And so the thought that should be a flash gets stuck. It becomes what I refer to daily in my offices as the one-loop roller coaster at the fair. The thought goes around and around and around in the quiet of kids' heads and becomes deafening.

I feel sick. I'm going to throw up.

I can't go to school. No one there likes me.

I have to check and recheck this until I get it right. I can't mess up.

A little fear becomes a big worry. And that worry loops around and around and around . . . until it feels a lot like a gigantic, catastrophic, insurmountable monster of anxiety. We'll call him the Worry Monster.

In her worries, your daughter often feels alone. She doesn't know that others feel the same way, because it's too scary to put her worries into words. Maybe people won't like her. Or they'll think she's weird. So she thinks she's the only one and that something *is* wrong with her.

This isn't unusual. When something goes wrong in a girl's world, she usually blames herself. (Boys are much more likely to blame someone else, such as Mom. Sorry, moms.) She doesn't yet know about the Worry Monster. We're going to talk a lot about him in the pages ahead, and even more in the pages of the book for her: *Braver, Stronger, Smarter*.

It doesn't help that we adults often don't know she's battling a worry monster. We only see her tears. Or anger. Or hear the endless questions. Her outsides don't match her insides, and her worries come out sideways through a whole host of other emotions. We don't understand. Neither does she.

The more she listens to the tricks the Worry Monster tries to play on her, the stronger he gets. But the more we learn about her Worry Monster, the weaker he gets. So, let's start with learning about the worry continuum.

The Worry Continuum

Starting with Fear

Quick—name one thing you’re afraid of. Now, one thing your daughter is afraid of.

When we use the word *afraid*, “of” often comes after it. *Of* means there’s something following it. Or a couple of somethings. It’s tied to the specific: spiders, monsters, speaking in public, etc. We all have fears of one kind or another. Some of us have more fears than others. Children share similar fears at certain ages. In fact, there are normal childhood fears that occur throughout their development.

Infants’ and toddlers’ normal fears revolve around separation—usually separation from you. They’re also afraid of strangers, loud noises, and sudden movements.

Preschool-aged children are in a stage of learning what’s real and what’s not. Many of their fears center around those types of things: the dark, monsters, ghosts, and then things that many of us wish weren’t real, like snakes, spiders, and doctors’ shots.

Elementary-school-aged children are entering an age of awareness. They’re suddenly old enough to know a little of what’s going on in the news and the world around them, so their fears center more on real-life dangers. They tend to be fearful of events such as losing a loved one, being kidnapped, storms, and death.

Middle-school-aged children are much more focused on (we could even say consumed by) the world of their peers. So their fears are related to being accepted by or ashamed in front of those peers. Their fears can also be connected to where they’re placing their burgeoning identities. If your daughter is inclined toward academics, she might be afraid of failing a test. If it’s athletics, her fear might be missing

a shot or performing poorly in a track meet. If she's into acting, she might be afraid of forgetting her lines. Almost every middle schooler is afraid of giving a speech in front of their class.

High-school-aged kids' fears often involve the same types of things their middle school fears did. But the stakes are higher now—and more intimate. They're afraid of rejection by either friends or a love interest. They're afraid of not having friends or a love interest. They're afraid of the future and their readiness for it. They're feeling pressure about future-oriented choices, including “fun” things like standardized tests, college, and what they're going to do with the rest of their lives.

With typical developmental fears, the operative word is *developmental*. Kids usually grow out of these fears. Toddlers have enough experiences with babysitters who order pizza and bring their own crafts that they realize it's actually kind of fun to have a babysitter. Young children learn that monsters don't really live under their beds. Your elementary-aged daughter goes upstairs alone enough times to finally feel comfortable doing it without you waiting at the bottom of the stairs. Toddlers become preschoolers, who become middle schoolers, who become high schoolers, who become adults mostly unscathed by their passing fears.

Fear passage involves two primary factors: experience and trust. As a kid, you experienced that the thing you were most afraid of didn't happen. You gave the speech, your face turned red, maybe your tummy even got upset, but you lived through it. You still had friends. You even got a pretty good grade. It wasn't so much that you experienced success. You experienced survival. You made it through. And when you make it through enough scary times, the fear passes.

However, there are times when the thing you're afraid of does happen. The storm really did get bad and turned into a tornado. Maybe that tornado even passed down your street.

Several years ago, I met with a nine-year-old girl whose primary fear was being away from her mom. She hated to be away from her, and when they were separated, she was afraid her mom would get hurt.

Her mom brought her in to see me right before a vacation she was taking with her dad—without their daughter. The girl was terrified that her mom was going to get into a car accident and die. During our session, we talked a lot about experience, but we also talked more specifically about evidence (something we'll come back to in the next section on help).

I asked a number of questions, trying to get the girl to see how little evidence there was for her fears.

“How many miles does your mom drive each week?” (You can guess the answer: somewhere in the hundreds.)

“Has your mom ever had a car accident?”

“Maybe one or two,” she replied.

“So, over the twenty years she’s been driving, she’s only had one or two accidents.” (I have a feeling this girl didn’t really know her mom’s driving record, but I decided to go with it.) “Do you think that means your mom is a good driver?”

“Yes.”

“Is your mom smart?”

“Yes.”

“Does she try her best to keep everyone safe, including herself?”

“Yes.”

“Then, do you really think your mom is going to have a car accident, based on the evidence?”

“No, I don’t,” she said. And a big smile spread across her face.

Now, let me tell you the rest of the story. My sessions start on the hour. But when my time with the girl ended, her mom hadn’t returned. I knew she was highly responsible (which was what made me feel safe to talk about her driving record), so when she wasn’t there at ten minutes, then fifteen minutes, then twenty minutes after, I was concerned. And, since this little girl was already bent

toward worry, she was *really* concerned. We went to sit out on the front porch to wait on her mom.

Finally, her mom ran up from the parking lot. From the edge of the Daystar Counseling lawn, she threw her hands up and shouted, laughing, “You’ll never believe why I was late. I had a wreck!”

I couldn’t believe it. *Seriously?* The little girl looked at me with the widest eyes you’ve ever seen. I expected tears, but they never came because her smart mom was laughing. She didn’t act like the car accident was a big deal at all. I took my cue from her and started laughing too. “Of all the things, we were just talking about car accidents.” I turned to the girl and said, “Your mom is a good driver, and, look, she had an accident, but she’s fine!”

That nine-year-old girl is now fourteen and no longer afraid of her mom getting in a car accident. In fact, she doesn’t even think about her mom much at all—welcome to adolescence! Her fear passed. Her mom had a wreck that day but didn’t on the ensuing trip with her dad. Or their family’s next trip. Over time, the girl’s experience led to trust—helped by the fact that her mom didn’t catastrophize the incident, another idea that we’ll come back to later. This girl and her mom also have a faith that makes a difference—more about that in the last section of the book.

For now, let’s remember that **fears are a normal part of childhood**. They come and go, based on your daughter’s developmental level. With experience and trust, time passes and fears pass. She comes through all the stronger for it. Unless she doesn’t, and those fears of hers grow into a more lingering sense of worry.

Moving to Worry

With worry, the scope gets a little broader. We’re worried “about,” rather than afraid “of.”

Now my questions become, What is one thing you’re worried about? One thing your daughter is worried about?

We worry more about concepts than specific things. You don’t necessarily worry about spiders. But you worry about bad things

happening to someone you love. Fear is narrower than worry but can move into worry, with the right (or wrong) set of circumstances. Fear moves to worry based partially on our experiences.

For example, I grew up in Arkansas and now live in Tennessee, so I worry that a storm might turn into a tornado more than someone who lives near the beach in Florida does. But she might worry a little more about hurricanes. I'm not worried about a hurricane one bit here in the landlocked South. Fears turn into worry when the evidence of your experience means something bad really does have a greater likelihood of happening.

If you're a student of the Enneagram personality types, you know people with certain "numbers" are more predisposed to worry. A person who is a six, for example, is described as the Loyalist and leans toward worry. My sister (a six) describes fellow sixes like ducks. When they swim, they look unruffled on the surface, but beneath the water their little legs are paddling like crazy. Whatever it is that is causing us to paddle about, worries leave us with a wider, more lingering sense of concern than fears do. (To learn more about the Enneagram, one book I'd suggest is *The Road Back to You* by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile.)

Worries tend to be future oriented. For infants and toddlers, this means they don't experience worry for very long, because they live so much in the present. Your little one, upon seeing you pick up your car keys, might worry that you're leaving her at home with the babysitter. A young child walking through Disney World might worry that she'll round the corner and run into Maleficent or another Disney villain. If you fly to visit an old friend, your elementary-aged child may worry that your plane will crash. A middle schooler will likely worry about her social status and what others think about her. Every high school junior and senior I have ever counseled is worried about what happens next, even if they don't act like it with you, as their parent. And the worries go on well into adulthood. Again, ahem, maybe you worry about your kids from time to time?

All is not lost, though.

When your daughter has a little help, a lot of empowerment, and a foundational faith, worries don't have to carry the same power in her life. With God's help, I really believe you *can* raise a worry-free girl. As *The Message* paraphrase of Matthew 11:28–30 says,

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Worries come and go. It's how you and she respond that makes the difference. Our goal is to understand fear, move through worries, and help her not get stuck in a loop of anxiety.

Children actually develop their own strategies for coping with worry. Your daughter has some right now that she probably doesn't even know are strategies. Again, we'll come back to those. We'll also learn how to give her even more tools that can help when the inevitable worries come.

Landing in Anxiety

Worry turns into anxiety for a variety of reasons. Trauma can cause a child who worries to develop anxiety. Genetics can, as well (again, we'll come back to that in the next chapter). Personality, environment, life circumstances, and a whole host of factors can cause a child who worries to become a child with anxiety. As I said, fears pass with time, experience, and trust. Worries come and go, for all of us. But anxiety, left untreated, only gets worse.

With anxiety, we've got a really wide scope. It's not “of” or “about” something. It's “I have” or “I am.”

It's a state of being: “I have anxiety,” “I am anxious.” And sadly, this state often comes to define us or the kids we love. In all my years of counseling, I've never had so many girls give me “I am” statements about anxiety as they have in the past five or so years.

Just as there is a continuum from fear to anxiety, there is also a continuum within anxiety itself. Anxiety looks different on different girls. It varies in intensity and expression. We'll describe those girls and the differences in their anxiety in the next chapter. Clinically, there are several types of anxiety, including the most common: generalized anxiety disorder (GAD); they are described in Appendix 1. But for now, I want to use the word *anxiety* in a more general sense and define it as a state of perpetual worry—a state that either returns frequently or just never quite seems to lift.

Anxiety is perpetual worry and also constant pressure. A girl with anxiety feels pressure to be sure about things. To be in control. To get it right. To know what's coming. To do anything and everything to prevent the dreaded thing (in her anxious way of thinking) from happening.

Girls with anxiety overestimate the threat and underestimate themselves and their ability to cope. The worst-case scenario becomes a normal life perspective.

Anxieties also follow along with a child's development. If we were to talk about a toddler and anxiety, we'd be talking about separation anxiety. I've counseled many elementary-aged girls who live with anxiety around something bad happening to one of their parents. In this age when statistics show suicide is on the rise, I also see a lot of girls from elementary school age through their teenage years who have anxiety related to suicide. It's not that they're suicidal. It's more that they're afraid they might accidentally do the scariest thing they've ever heard of. (Remember the bridge thought at the beginning of the chapter?) I have seen many girls over the years feel anxious about possibly vomiting in class. As you might guess, more often than not, they're in fifth or sixth grade. They're starting middle school, and the worst thing they can imagine is embarrassing themselves in front of their friends. Plus, it's kind of miserable in every way to throw up. For high school girls, their anxiety is bound up in performance or relationships. In the culture we're living in now, it's also often tied to their sexuality.

We're all afraid of these things from time to time. However, these children don't just think about them once or from time to time. They have the same flash of a scary thought. But, remember, with anxiety they overestimate the problem and underestimate themselves. A slight chance becomes a huge risk that they can't let go of. And so the anxious thought starts to loop and goes around and around and around.

A psychiatrist with whom I work regularly and whom I respect a great deal said to me several years ago, "Kids have anxiety around whatever is basically the worst thing they can imagine happening at their age. With teenagers, those thoughts are most often violent or sexual in nature."

At the time, I was counseling a girl in high school who was having both sexual and violent thoughts toward certain people, including her friends and even the children she babysat. But, let me tell you, no one would have ever known. She was the kind of teenager you'd want your daughter to grow up to be like. She was a leader among her peers. She was kind and conscientious and tried hard in most everything she did. But she was riddled with anxiety. In fact, we talked a great deal about how those thoughts weren't her. They were her anxiety trying to take over. Remember that old Worry Monster? I don't honestly believe she was capable of or even wanted to do those things. But she had a flash of a thought, and it got stuck. And she literally thought she was going crazy. Her anxiety was rooted in an overestimation of the problem and a lack of trust in herself. It took her months to feel safe enough to say the words that were looping in her head out loud to me. And when she did, there was so much shame that came out with them.

Another primary factor of anxiety is that **anxiety is born out of fear but has a response that is disproportionate to the fear itself**. This summer at our camp, a girl cried and yelled for over an hour because she had to walk through a swarm of bugs to get to the lake. Her response was disproportionate to her fear, although I'll admit the bugs were awfully yucky.

Because anxiety shows up in children in different ways, the Worry Monster can be sneaky and hard to recognize. Some anxious children will scream and cry. They will rage at you if you disrupt their schedule or system. Or maybe they won't. Their responses may be huge and loud and feel attention seeking. Or, they may quietly spend hours going over and over and over the same math problems to get them just right.

Maybe you've noticed that your daughter seems to have more fears than her friends do. Maybe she talks often about worst-case scenarios. Maybe her teacher has mentioned anxiety. Or your girl has. Whatever the situation, I know you want your daughter to feel braver, stronger, and smarter. You want her to have a faith that brings her peace and comfort. But, right now, it's not happening. The Worry Monster seems to have a bigger voice than she does. And, because her Worry Monster is in control, your Worry Monster is starting to turn up the volume with you.

When You Need to Worry about Her Level of Worry

From my experience, I am guessing that reading all this could have you more concerned than before. You've already seen your daughter several times in these pages. If you have, I don't want you to worry. My hope is that this book is going to work me out of a job. I will teach you anxiety-fighting strategies to try at home first. Your relationship and teamwork as she fights her Worry Monster are going to be her most important weapons for beating him.

For some girls, however, an understanding of worry and the tools to battle it may not be enough. As a counselor, I often compare the therapeutic process to a cold or sinus infection. Physicians won't give you antibiotics at first, because they want your immune system to do the work, knowing that your immune system becomes stronger for having fought off the infection. There is a great chance that, between you and your daughter, she has everything she needs to fight the Worry Monster. She will still worry from

time to time, but through this book (and, if she's elementary-aged, the companion activity book), she'll know his tricks and have the tools to manage her worry. She'll actually be stronger for having fought the battle. But sometimes your immune system just can't take down the infection on its own. In those times, you need an antibiotic.

The antibiotic for her anxiety may simply be taking her to therapy. Counseling may sound scary, but it doesn't have to be. We often say at Daystar that we're not telling kids anything different than you are, as their parents. We're just a new voice, so they sometimes hear us a little louder. We also have the training and experience to help kids battle anxiety. If it feels like you're not enough to help her, it's not really because you're not enough. It's that her anxiety has taken root to the degree that she just needs a stronger antibiotic.

"How do I find the right counselor?" you may be wondering. There are counselors all over the world who do fantastic work with kids. It can be a great idea to interview the counselor yourself first. Go to their office. If you have a young child, make sure the office is kid friendly. You want to find a counselor who is warm and kind but can also be strong when needed. And, obviously, you want a therapist who has good training and experience in counseling children. And those, by the way, are all appropriate things to ask about.

Every time my colleagues and I travel and speak across the country, we're approached about counselors in that particular city. I wish we had a referral base for counselors we know and trust in every city. We haven't quite gotten there, but your school or your church can be a great source for referrals. They know from experience who works well with children and adolescents. Don't be afraid to reach out. In this day and time, anyone who loves kids knows that children and parents alike need support. And that is the bottom line of what all of us who call ourselves counselors and therapists are: support for your child and for you. We're an extension of your team for however long you need us.

As a counselor, I need to say that there are times when therapy isn't enough and medication is needed. Some of the most common medications are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRI medications. Years ago, a psychiatrist explained SSRI medications to me. He talked about the brain like two cars. He described synapses, those gaps in the nerve cells of our brains we studied in science class as kids. He said that serotonin fires across the synapses, keeping our brains working the way they're supposed to—keeping us emotionally and mentally healthy. When we're sad or anxious for a long enough period, the serotonin stops firing. At that point, no amount of therapy or intervention strategies can help other than a replacement for the serotonin. He likened medication to a jumper cable stretching from one end of a synapse to the next. Medication gets it firing again.

I know many parents are fearful of medication because of certain studies and statistics they might have read. I understand your concern. I believe medication should be the last resort for children. Unfortunately, in our culture, many parents are more likely to medicate their children than provide them with therapy. I do believe therapy makes a profound difference. But I have had hundreds of situations in my counseling office where medication was necessary for the emotional and mental health of a child. I've also had thousands of children who haven't needed medication, for whom therapy was enough. While I do believe medicine is necessary at times, I would not move forward into the arena of medicine without pursuing therapy first and consulting with a child psychiatrist.

When should you take your daughter to therapy?

- If you've already attempted to help your daughter on your own with specific strategies designed for anxiety, such as the strategies contained in this book, and they haven't made a difference.
- If your child has suffered from anxiety for several months, especially more than six months.

- If you have seen signs of anxiety that have recurred in several stages of her development.
- If your daughter's self-esteem has been impacted by anxiety to the degree that you feel like she's showing signs of withdrawal and even depression.
- If you see her suffering across the primary areas of her life: home, school, and friendships.
- If she's no longer able to go to school.
- If anxiety prevents her from doing the things she loves most.
- If she is affected physically to the point that she's truly sick and her pediatrician has said there's no physical cause.

Whatever the situation is, whatever degree of worry your daughter is facing, I assure you she can work through it. Just as I've seen an anxiety epidemic in my office, I've also seen thousands of girls who have beaten their Worry Monsters.

I know that you're ready for her to be free of her worries. I can assure you she is too. Children want to be independent. She not only wants you to feel proud of her, she wants to feel proud of herself. But, remember, especially if she's anxious, she underestimates herself. She needs help. She needs you to understand not only what's happening to her, but why. (Hint: It's really for reasons that speak to the bravery and strength and intelligence that are already inside of her. But she doesn't know that yet.) In the meantime, she needs you to believe in her. She needs you to remind her often that she's capable. And she needs you to give her opportunities to prove it.



Key Points to Remember

- We all have hundreds of intrusive thoughts daily. Kids don't say those thoughts out loud for fear someone will think something is wrong with them.
- Girls tend to blame themselves for things. Because of this and their desire for relationship, girls, in particular, struggle with voicing their worries out loud.
- Fear, worry, and anxiety all exist on the same continuum.
- Fears are a normal part of her growing up. In fact, there are typical fears children face at different stages of their development. The passage of those fears has to do with two primary factors: experience and trust.
- Worry is more conceptual than fear. Fears turn to worry when the evidence increases the likelihood of the scary thing happening.
- Children develop their own strategies for dealing with worry.
- Anxiety is a state of perpetual worry and constant pressure.
- Anxiety, left untreated, only gets worse.
- Anxiety always involves an overestimation of the problem and an underestimation of herself.
- Anxiety is born out of fear but has a reaction that is disproportionate to the fear.
- For some children, counseling and even medication are needed to work through their level of anxiety. This does not mean that you're not helping as a parent. It just means you need a bigger, more specifically trained team.
- Your daughter can beat the Worry Monster. She needs you to remind her and give her opportunities.
- The more you and she learn about her worries, the weaker they get. The more she listens to them, the stronger they become.

Understanding Yourself and Your Daughter Better

What have you realized about your daughter after reading this chapter?

What have you realized about yourself?

Do you have looping thoughts? Does your daughter? What are those thoughts about?

Do you believe she leans more toward fears, worry, or anxiety?

Have you ever struggled with anxiety, based on this chapter's descriptions?

If so, how old were you, and what was your anxiety centered on?

Does your child overestimate threats?

Does she underestimate herself?

Do you struggle with either of these concepts?

What do you want for her, having read the pages of this chapter?

Where do you see your daughter as capable and strong?

When could you take an opportunity to remind her of those things?