

“Sissy Goff is unquestionably the expert
in helping young women identify their
strengths and areas of need.”

—ANNIE F. DOWNS

Brave

**A Teen Girl's Guide
to Beating
Worry and Anxiety**

Sissy Goff MEd, LPC-MHSP

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*I think of faith as a kind of whistling in the dark because,
in much the same way, it helps to give us courage
and to hold the shadows at bay . . . to demonstrate,
if only to ourselves, that not even the dark can quite overcome
our trust in the ultimate triumph of the Living Light.*

—Frederick Buechner



I have had the tremendous privilege of bearing witness to the whistling of thousands of girls in my almost thirty years as a counselor at Daystar Counseling Ministries. They have taught me, and their parents with them, what it looks like to truly live out this idea—this force—this blessed hope of bravery. This book is written for them, the girls and young women who have allowed me to sit with them in their stories and hear them whistle with strength, with beauty, and with a buoyant hope. Light wins every time. Thanks for leading the charge and being reminders of what it looks like to take heart, live brave, and whistle.

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To the Parent Who Bought This Book

First of all, thank you. If you bought this book, my guess is you have a worrier, or you're worried that you have a worrier. I truly believe this book will help. Second, if you're *really* worried that you have a worrier, I suggest you grab a copy of *Raising Worry-Free Girls*. Here's why:

When my publisher first approached me about writing a book for girls on worry and anxiety, my immediate response was, "Only if you'll let me write one for parents too." Anxiety is not just a childhood epidemic in America today. It's also a parenting epidemic. If you struggle with anxiety, your child is up to seven times more likely to struggle with it herself.¹ A few more interesting facts: Most kids go two years before receiving any kind of help for their anxiety, and anxiety left untreated usually gets worse.² By the way, that's most of the bad news in *Raising Worry-Free Girls*. The rest of it is filled with good news that can help you and the worried girl you love, whatever her age.

Anxiety is tricky because it often doesn't look like anxiety. For younger girls, it can look more like manipulation and anger. As girls get older, it morphs into type A behavior or perfectionism.

It also looks like the child who loves control. The source of worry morphs over time as well, so it's easy to think the signs of anxiety were part of a phase because as soon as you start to notice how much she's worried about being away from you, it stops. A few months or years later, though, it emerges as worry about flying on airplanes or throwing up or any other unrelated topic. And the whac-a-mole game of parenting a child with anxiety begins. My guess is that if you have a teenager who is prone to worry, she's been that way for quite some time. It's undoubtedly enough to make you anxious, if you weren't already.

In this book I have outlined a few guidelines for her. My hope is that reading *Brave*, for her, will be much like sitting in my counseling office at Daystar. Obviously, I'm not in person with her, although I wish I were. But many of the same guidelines still apply—for her and for you.

The most important guideline is confidentiality. Not for her. She's welcome to talk to whomever she likes. I certainly hope she talks about her worries with you. In fact, I'll encourage that often throughout this book. The confidentiality clause is for you. I can't tell you how many times over the years of counseling girls I've heard a parent say something like "She left her journal out in the den because she really wanted me to read it." Teenagers are forgetful. Have you noticed how many things she leaves out? This book will only help if she's honest in what she writes, and that honesty will only happen if she believes you won't look through this book when she's at school. I know you want to help, but I recommend that you let this be her space. Every teenager needs space to process her emotions.

So here are your main guidelines:

1. Give her space to process.
2. The work is hers, not yours. Sorry—it sounds a little harsh, I know. You will also be tempted—and I would imagine have been tempted a lot over the years—to rescue her. In fact, the two most common strategies for dealing

with anxiety are escape and avoidance, according to cognitive therapy experts David Clark and Aaron Beck.³ I don't mean you avoiding her, but you helping her escape and avoid whatever is making her anxious. If you have done those things, I have every confidence it was with the best of intentions. The problem is that neither strategy actually helps. The definition of anxiety I came up with in *Raising Worry-Free Girls* is this: "Anxiety always involves an overestimation of the problem and an underestimation of herself."⁴ For her to work through her fear, she'll have to do the thing that scares her. I'm going to give her a lot of tools in these pages. She is capable. The work is hers.

3. Ask her open-ended questions about her work from time to time. Teenagers shut down when they feel like their parents are interrogating them (moms, I'm not pointing the finger specifically at you, but . . .). Don't ask her about it every day. Give her space to process. But every so often, ask her how it's going. What does she think of the book? What's one thing she's learned recently? I tell parents that breezy is the best posture when it comes to teenagers. Act breezy. If you care more than she does, she'll likely care less—on purpose.
4. Give her time to answer. She may not answer you right away. She may have to think about it. That's okay. Again, give her time and space to process.
5. Be aware of what you reinforce. Whatever you pay the most attention to as a parent is what's most reinforced. Pay more attention to her courage than her anxiety. Praise her for her bravery. Call out any time you see strength in her. Connect with her around what she can do and how she is capable, rather than the times she isn't or does her best to communicate to you that she's not. I have had teenage girls tell me that their moms are most nurturing when they have panic attacks. Be aware of what you're attending to the most.

6. When all else fails, offer empathy and questions. Empathy is always a good place to start with teenagers. It's hard to be a teenage girl in today's world—yes, harder than it was for us. It means a great deal to her when she knows that you see that. Empathize, and then ask questions. “That sounds hard. What do you think would help?” “What do you think is the best thing to do?” “What is your heart telling you?” “What do you hear God saying to you?” Questions imply capability. We want her to believe that she's capable. Even if she doesn't have an answer, just the fact that you asked communicates that you believe she's capable. She is bigger than her worries. She's stronger than whatever problem is facing her right now. She's got to do the work. But you can offer support through empathy, questions, and a whole lot of encouragement along the way.

Introduction

Hey! My name is Sissy. I'm so glad to get to meet you—although I really wish we were meeting in person rather than just in the pages of this book. I have a feeling we'd like each other. But for now, we can do our best to imagine how things would go if we were meeting in person.

Let's start with a little backstory. Maybe you've been worrying some lately.

Maybe you've been worried about what your friends think of you and whether they notice when you say the things that you think sound kind of awkward sometimes (and whether they're just acting like they don't notice). And then you replay what you said and try to figure out from their reaction if it really was awkward and if they'll want to keep hanging out with you. Your mind keeps thinking about it, over and over and over.

Maybe just being with others makes you nervous. Adults are fine, but people your age are a different story. It's hard to know what to say or when to say it. It's even hard to know who to talk to in unstructured social times, like at lunch or youth group. So it becomes easier to hang back or stay away from those situations completely. The problem is that the more you pull back, the harder it is to step back in. The worry becomes so consuming that it's all

you can think about when you're with people, so spending time around other people happens less and less often. People besides your family, that is. But the worry about missing out nags at you too.

Or maybe you threw up with the last round of the flu. Now every time you get a little sick—or your stomach feels the slightest bit weird—you can't stop thinking that you might throw up. You end up making yourself feel sick just from thinking so much about being sick.

Maybe you can't fall asleep at night because your brain won't stop looping through all the things you worry about.

Maybe you've worried ever since you were little, although the topics have changed. And you've wondered, after hearing other people in school talk about anxiety, if that might be what's going on with you. Maybe you feel pretty sure it is.

Maybe, when you worry, things don't feel quite right, but you've found a few things that help. Things like counting even numbers, tapping, washing your hands, or checking on things. Maybe you have something you do that makes you feel better at bedtime, even though that thing doesn't totally feel like it makes sense.

Maybe you worry about getting worried, and that if the thing that happened recently really was a panic attack, you could have one again at any moment.

Now let's imagine your mom or dad has noticed. They've noticed because you're spending more time in your room, or you're missing school because of headaches. Maybe you're not interested in doing things with friends as much as you used to be. Or maybe you brought it up to them and they said, "We think it's time to talk to someone."

Those words can sound kind of ominous. "Talking to someone" about the things that are going on deep inside of you, when you've never even met that person, can feel intimidating or awkward.

Or it might not. You might have friends in counseling and you've been curious if it would help you too. You might have wanted to

bring the subject up with your parents but weren't sure how or whether they would think something was wrong with you.

That's where I come in.

Let me interrupt our imagining to say that there is NOTHING wrong with you. Nothing at all—unless the same thing is wrong with almost one out of every three kids in your grade.¹ You are totally normal. In fact, you're a lot better than normal. But we'll come back to that.

I got us off the track of our story. Your parents told you—or you decided—it was time to try counseling. Now you've gotten pulled out of math class to come to my office. You drive up to an adorable yellow house with a white picket fence.

“Is this really where we're going?”

“Yes,” your parents say. “This is Daystar.”

(Daystar is where I get to sit with girls like you and their families every day, and have for almost thirty years. I sound a lot older than I feel, by the way.)

You walk in the front door of Daystar to find a lobby that looks more like a Pottery Barn living room than an office. Not exactly what you were expecting from a counselor's office.

You're greeted by smiling faces and given a tour of the house. You're even offered popcorn in our kitchen. After a few minutes, I come down the stairs to meet you, followed by my little therapy assistant, Lucy, a black-and-white fluff ball of a Havanese puppy.

Then we'd go upstairs to my office. I'd sit across from you, Lucy would likely sit right next to you or crawl up in your lap, and we'd start talking.

Actually, I'd start by telling you that anything you



tell me is confidential and that I want Daystar to feel like a safe place for you. In reality, as much as a book can, I want you to feel this book is a safe place too.

- A place for you to learn more about not only what's going on inside of you, but who you are.
- A place for you to write about what you're feeling and learning.
- A place for you to discover more of who God has made you to be and the immense strength and courage He has placed inside you.

This book is called *Brave* because that's what I believe you are already, even though we haven't actually met. There are a few reasons I know you're brave, which we'll get to later. For now, just reading this introduction means you're brave—that you know worry is something you struggle with and you're ready to fight it. I absolutely trust that you can.

I have a feeling whoever bought this book for you believes the same thing. So even though we haven't met, consider me a part of your team. That really is what I do for a living. I have the profound privilege of cheering on some of the most amazing girls in the world—girls just like you. My dog, Lucy, and I both do. It's a pretty incredible job. Plus, who wouldn't want to take their dog to work?

I hope I've already earned a little bit of your trust and that you'll keep reading. I really do think you'll finish this book not only knowing practical ways to fight your worry and anxiety, but also having found more of you along the way—with all of the bravery, strength, and heart God has placed inside of you.

Rules for Reading

Okay, they're not really rules. I don't want you to shut this book immediately. They're more like guidelines or even just things to remember. So cross out "Rules for Reading." Literally—take your pen and cross that statement out right now.

A Few Things to Remember

1. There is no wrong answer. The goal is for you to discover more of you, remember? What you feel and think is important. So I want you to write it, or draw it, if you're more of a draw-er.
2. Don't worry about someone finding this book and reading it. Okay, your little sister might, so maybe you should hide it somewhere good. But that's why I wrote the note in the beginning to your parents, letting them know this book is for you—to process your emotions on your own. Don't worry about them finding the book and reading what you've written. It's so important that you write about or draw your feelings. At some point, I'm also going to encourage you to talk about them.

3. Be honest with yourself. It's going to be hard to admit some of the things we talk about. It's hard sometimes to talk about struggles. It's especially hard when you want to do things right, which I imagine is true about you. It's true about me too, which is why I know. This book will only help, however, if you're honest.
4. Practice. This is actually the most important guideline. The number one reason girls—and really anyone—don't work through their anxiety is that they don't practice the skills they learn to fight the anxiety. So as we go through this book, I'm going to give you different types of homework. I know—not a fun word—but this homework will be fun. Actually, what's fun is the confidence I KNOW you will gain, although the work might be hard at times.
5. Share. I guess in number 3 I made it seem like you could just write or draw about things, but I really do want you to talk. I want you to know you're not alone in what you're feeling, which is why I'm including the stories of other girls in these pages. But I also want you to be talking to people you can see in-person, people who will be able to respond to you in real time. I want you to have other people on this team who are cheering you on—just like I am.

Here we go. . . .

Section One

Understanding

1. Defining the Worry Words

I don't think it's ever been harder to be a teenager than it is today. Especially a teenage girl. Again, I've been counseling girls for almost thirty years. That's a lot of years. And a lot of girls.

I'll share reasons why I believe the teen years are hard, but first, I'd love to know what you think. *Do you agree? Why do you think it's especially hard to be a teenage girl today?*

That's a great list, I'm sure. Here's something I want you to know as we go through this book together. What you're saying

makes sense. I know, I know—I can't hear you. But I still know it's true. The most important thing is not even what you say, but that you're saying it. For that reason, there is going to be a lot of space in this book for you to journal—and draw too, if you're more of a draw-er than a journaler. I'd love for you to do a little of both.

Worry's Best Tricks

Anxiety has a lot of tricks it tries to play on you. We'll talk about specific tricks and tools in the "Help" section, but I'm going to go ahead and tell you two of worry's biggest tricks.

Worry tries to make you think

- 1) **something is wrong with you.**
- 2) **you're the only one who feels this way.**

Anxiety—we'll give him a better name later—is a big fat liar. Both statements above are untrue. Sadly, though, almost every girl I've met has believed those two things. It's why I want to disprove them both right here in the beginning. They're his best tricks, and he's the *worst* for trying to tell you those things.

Nothing is wrong with you. We're going to talk in chapter 2 about why you specifically might struggle with worry and anxiety, but I'll go ahead and tell you that rather than something being wrong with your brain, it means something is really right. And you're in good company. Actually, almost one in three kids struggle with anxiety,¹ and girls are twice as likely as boys.²

That means there's a good chance it's also happening to the girl who sits beside you in class, or the one whose locker is next to yours, or even the girl in your grade who intimidates you the most. It might be happening to your best friend too, and you don't know because neither of you has said it out loud. That's what happens with worry and anxiety. We have these thoughts . . . these scary thoughts that feel like they consume us at times. We feel like we're the only ones, so we don't say anything to anyone. The

thoughts make us feel like something is wrong with us. Again, I can promise you that it's not. And we've already started to disprove the second idea; you can tell from the statistics that you're not alone. I sit with girls every day who have those kinds of thoughts looping around in their very normal, very smart brains. More on that later too.

You're not alone. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: What! You, too? I thought that no one but myself . . ." ³ Anxiety tries to make you feel like you are the only one who's ever worried this much or who has ever worried about something that sounds this silly. (It's really not silly, no matter what it is. It might sound silly to you when the worry passes, but it sure feels real when you're in the worry.)

Anxiety is an isolator. Because it makes us feel like something is wrong with us, we don't end up talking about it.

We've established that anxiety is a liar and an isolator. It's also very confusing, which is one reason it's particularly hard to be a teenage girl today.

I remember sitting with a group of girls your age not too long ago. We were talking about how common it is for teenage girls to use the word *anxiety* when describing themselves or how they felt about a certain situation. "I have anxiety," or "I had an anxiety attack last night," or "Such-and-such gives me anxiety." You know. You've heard these statements too. I will never forget the words one girl said: "We probably use the word so much because no one would listen if you just said you were stressed." All of the other girls agreed. *Have you ever felt that way?*

For sure

No, not really

When I was growing up, if we wanted to really upset our parents, we might say, "I'm going to run away!" Now girls as young as eight are threatening to take their own lives when they're mad at their parents. I would imagine that you hear people talk about how "depressed they are," mention that they had a "panic attack" the

night before, or throw around words like *suicidal* and *bipolar* and *PTSD* at the lunch table almost daily. Now, don't get me wrong—some of those girls might really be experiencing those struggles. But here's the problem: Some aren't. You know that already. Some just want big words to describe their big feelings. Others want someone to listen and feel like no one is, including their parents or their peers, so they think the bigger their words, the more likely someone will be to listen.

Here's another problem: When girls use those words when they're not really experiencing those things, the words lose their meaning. Then, when you're struggling, it's hard to know what the word really does mean or whether anyone will listen to you, because it feels like everyone your age today has anxiety.

That's where we're going to start, with the definitions of the words you hear thrown around a lot among girls your age. You might have even noticed that I've been using the words *worry* and *anxiety* interchangeably. Fear, worry, anxiety, stress, pressure, and even anxiety disorders are all important to understand in today's world. I truly believe that the more we know about worry and anxiety, the easier they are to beat. So let's start with a few definitions of these worry words, from a counselor's perspective.

The Worry Continuum

In the book for your parents, I talked about what I call “the worry continuum.” It looks a little like this:



Fear

It all starts with fear. Fears are those things we're afraid of . . . that maybe make us jump or even scream sometimes. You might be afraid of spiders, snakes, or jellyfish in the ocean. Those are three of my biggies. An important word with fear is that we're afraid *of* something. Fears are objects that our amygdala has developed an unpleasant emotional attachment to. We'll talk more about the amygdala later. But fear is usually attached to something, or even the threat of that thing. When the thing or the threat comes, our emotions take over. (According to my babysitter, Lauren, I'd only let her pick me up if there was a bug near me—or I thought there was. I'd scream, cry, and run to her.) When we are in the presence of the object we fear, we have a great deal of emotion, but once it's gone, so is the emotion. We move on.

What are your top three fears?

Worry

Fear changes to worry when it hangs around a little more. Worry is more pervasive, meaning it doesn't go away just because

we get away from the bug. We're not worried *of* something, we're worried *about* it. It revolves around more of a general subject than a specific object. We worry that someone we love might get cancer. We worry we won't make good enough grades or won't be able to beat our personal record in a track meet. We worry our friends are mad at us, or that we come off as awkward sometimes with other people.

What are three things you worry about?

Anxiety

Then there's anxiety. The word *anxiety* really has replaced the word *worry* for most girls your age I know, but anxiety is different from fear or worry. Anxiety can be about any of the things we feel afraid of or worried about—but instead of the fear or worry passing through our minds, it gets stuck. I tell girls all the time in my counseling office that it's like the one-loop roller coaster at the fair. You know it, if you've seen one. It's a roller coaster, but it doesn't go anywhere but the same loop, over and over and over. When you have anxiety, your scary thought circles around and around, and you just can't seem to make it stop.

If you had to say right now the thing that loops around the most in your brain—that you worry about and can't seem to make stop—what would it be? It can be something that makes a lot of

sense, or even feels silly. *I've talked to girls who have looping thoughts about everything you can imagine. What's yours?*

You might even have a couple of things that loop in your brain. It could be that you had one thing a few years ago, but now you have a new thing that's replaced it. Maybe, when you were younger, you worried that something terrible would happen to your mom or dad. You could hardly stand to have a babysitter or for them to go out of town, you'd get so worried. Now maybe you worry about getting a bad grade or doing something wrong. Maybe you even feel like you have to tell your parents every single thing you ever do wrong, or even things you think you might do wrong. Maybe you got sick and threw up a few months ago, and now every time your tummy feels a bit off, you worry you're going to throw up again. Maybe you worry your friends don't want to be your friends any longer. That they think you're annoying and they're only being nice because they don't want to seem rude.

Naming the Worry

Here's the thing about anxiety. It's a little like the Whac-A-Mole game at Chuck E. Cheese. You remember—you are standing over a board, holding a hammer. A little mole pops up. And just when you bang the hammer down, he pops up somewhere else. And again.

And again. The mole knows how to get under your skin. Anxiety is the same. It's not only a liar and an isolator, but it's smart. In fact, I think it's time to interrupt this information on anxiety to go ahead and give him a name. It could be a him or her. It could even be an it. But my guess is that you already know his voice. He's the one who tells you things like these:

"You can't."

"It's too hard."

"You'll never do enough."

"The worst thing you can imagine happening is the thing that most likely will happen."

"You'll fail."

"They'll laugh."

"Your mom is going to get cancer."

"If you don't check and recheck the door, someone might come in and hurt your family."

"Someone already has come in and hurt your family, and they're on the way up the stairs to you."

That last sentence is something that used to loop in my brain when I was in high school. I'd lie awake in bed at night, terrified. I would imagine that someone had already killed my parents and was coming up the stairs to get me. I had this strange game I played with myself where I'd watch the clock and think, *If I just make it to 3:20, I'll be okay.* And *Now I have to make it to 3:30. Then I'll be okay.* And so on. Not only was the worry telling me the worst-case scenario had come true, but it was also telling me something I had to do to make myself feel better. I'd lie there in my bed, watching the clock, listening and obeying everything that worry told me. Only I didn't have anyone telling me that the voice wasn't true, that it was worry lying. And I certainly didn't know anyone else had ever felt the same way. I wish I had. I wish I had known that I could beat him. I think it would have helped me learn how to fight

anxiety much younger than I did. Now I know how to recognize his voice and know not to give him any power. He doesn't deserve it. Not in my world or in yours.

What are some things worry says to you?

Let's come up with a name for that lying, isolating, smart, truly annoying voice that whispers those kinds of lies to you. We want to give him a name because I want you to remember that his voice is not yours. It's not yours, and it's not true. Many of the younger girls I work with call him the Worry Monster. One calls him Bob. I know some high school girls who call him things like the Great Exaggerator or He Who Must Not Be Named or just plain Worry, and I know one girl who named hers Agnes. The point is, we want to separate his (or her) voice from yours. Plus, it's easier to talk about him when he has a name.

As a side note, when we talk about someone who isolates and lies and is smart, it sure reminds me of someone else that you may be thinking of too. I did a podcast not too long ago with my friend Annie F. Downs. I don't know if you've read her books, but I highly recommend them. When we were talking about the Worry Monster, she looked at me and said, "Is it demonic?" I laughed and thought she was kidding, mostly because that's not a word I use to describe things very much. She wasn't kidding—and yes, it is, although calling it demonic might not be the way you normally talk about things either. Basically, she was saying, "Is that Satan's voice

disguised as the Worry Monster?” It sure is. Satan, in Scripture, is called the Father of Lies. John 8:44 says, “He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” I absolutely believe that his voice and the worry voice you hear in your head are one and the same. Call him the Enemy if you’d rather—but only if thinking of him that way won’t cause you more anxiety. I don’t want you to have a looping thought that Satan is in your head. He’s not. He just tries to lie and trick you into worrying, just like he tries to trick you into other destructive things. The great news is that Jesus has already beaten him and given you the power to beat him too—whatever name you call him.

Because of how smart and sneaky he is, I’m going to call him the Worry Whisperer for now. Regardless of what we call him, we need to understand his ways. The more we learn about him, the easier it is to fight him.

Here’s what we’ve learned about the Worry Whisperer so far:

- He’s a liar.
- He’s an isolator.
- He’s confusing.
- And he’s smart, in a sneaky kind of way.

The Whac-a-Mole Ways of Worry

The Worry Whisperer knows the things that you are most likely to worry about at any given age. He knows the thing that would be the scariest in second grade—like something bad happening to your parents. And sixth grade—like throwing up. And tenth grade—like failing a certain subject or being abandoned by friends. He then takes those intrusive thoughts (intrusive because they intrude on whatever you’re thinking about right then) and drops them into your brain. Because those thoughts represent the scariest thing

you can imagine at that particular age, they are the thoughts that have the most power. Therefore, they're the thoughts that get stuck. Whac-a-mole. You beat him in one area in second grade. He pops up in a different way in sixth. And so on. The great news is the tools that beat him in second grade work in sixth and tenth as well. They continue to work when you're a grown-up too. Anxiety expert Tamar Chansky says that although "anxiety is the number one mental health problem facing children and adolescents today . . . it is also the most treatable."⁴ We're gonna prove together just how weak this Worry Whisperer is!

I do want to mention two more words that aren't used much in your world anymore, though they certainly should be. *Stress* and *pressure*. We're going to talk about them both in the next chapter. Stress is a powerful force and one that kicks the Worry Whisperer into high gear. I believe you live with profoundly more stress than I did when I was growing up, and more than your mom and grandmother grew up with. You live with more pressure to get things right, to succeed, to look beautiful, and to have all of your friends and followers on social media respond. It's a lot.

I'm going to use the words *worry* and *anxiety* in this book interchangeably, mostly because some of you live more in the land of worry, some of you struggle more with anxiety, and some of you flip back and forth. In fact, we all worry at least a little—people who don't worry at all certainly aren't reading this book.

When to Worry about Your Level of Worry

Actually, I don't ever want you to worry about your worry. Maybe we should call this section "When to Make Sure You Have Someone in Your Life to Help You with Your Level of Worry." In this book, we're going to be talking about worry and anxiety both. I do want you to know that we can feel anxious and even struggle with anxiety without it being "diagnosable." Diagnosable anxiety is what the folks in my profession would refer to as a disorder. It

could also be called clinical anxiety at that point. Clinical anxiety comes in many shapes and sizes. There's social anxiety, phobias (debilitating fears around certain objects), panic disorder, and panic attacks. Obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are very similar to anxiety disorders. And then there's the wider diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder, as well as several others. Just because you identify with the anxiety we talk about in this book does not necessarily mean that you have one of these or any kind of anxiety disorder. Don't jump to diagnosing yourself. Your feelings are valid even without a diagnosis. You don't want to be defined by a struggle you're experiencing.

If any of the following apply to you, I want you to talk to someone. Show your parents this section of the book and let them know I said it was time.

- If your anxiety is debilitating, meaning you aren't able to do or think about anything else when the anxiety hits.
- If it interrupts your daily life.
- If you try the things in this book and they don't seem to help—or they don't help enough.
- If anxiety is affecting at least two of the three most important parts of your life: your family, your friends, your schoolwork.
- If it's gone on for at least six months.

Anxiety left untreated only gets worse. It can also lead to depression when it goes on for too long. But we're not going to let it.

Here's the good news: You can do this. You're not alone. You've got me, and you've got people in your life who love you and want to help. You've got a God who delights in you and has beaten every Worry Whisperer that's ever been or ever will be. And I know that you've got more strength, more resourcefulness, more grit, and more brave going on inside of you than you think. God made you that way. I can't wait for you to see that version of you in action.

A Few *Brave* Things to Remember

- It's never been harder to be a teenage girl than it is today.
- Worry tries to make you think something is wrong with you and you're the only one who feels this way. Neither is true.
- Anxiety is a liar and an isolator. It's also very confusing.
- *Fears* have to do with something we're afraid of—that our amygdala has developed an unpleasant emotional attachment to. *Worry* doesn't go away just because we get away from the thing we're afraid of. It's more about a general subject than a specific object. *Anxiety* is when those fears are worries that get stuck—much like the one-loop roller coaster at the fair.
- It's important to give your anxiety a name so you can remember that his voice is not only not yours, but it's also not true.
- The subject your worry loops around changes as you get older. Basically, it's the scariest thing you can imagine happening at any specific age.
- Anxiety left untreated only gets worse. If your worry or anxiety seems to be getting worse, or you're just not sure what to do to make it better, talk to your mom or dad. Find a grown-up at school or church you can trust and who can help you find your way to help—and to beating this lying, isolating, confusing Worry Whisperer. You can do this!