

Understanding and Managing Anxiety and Fears

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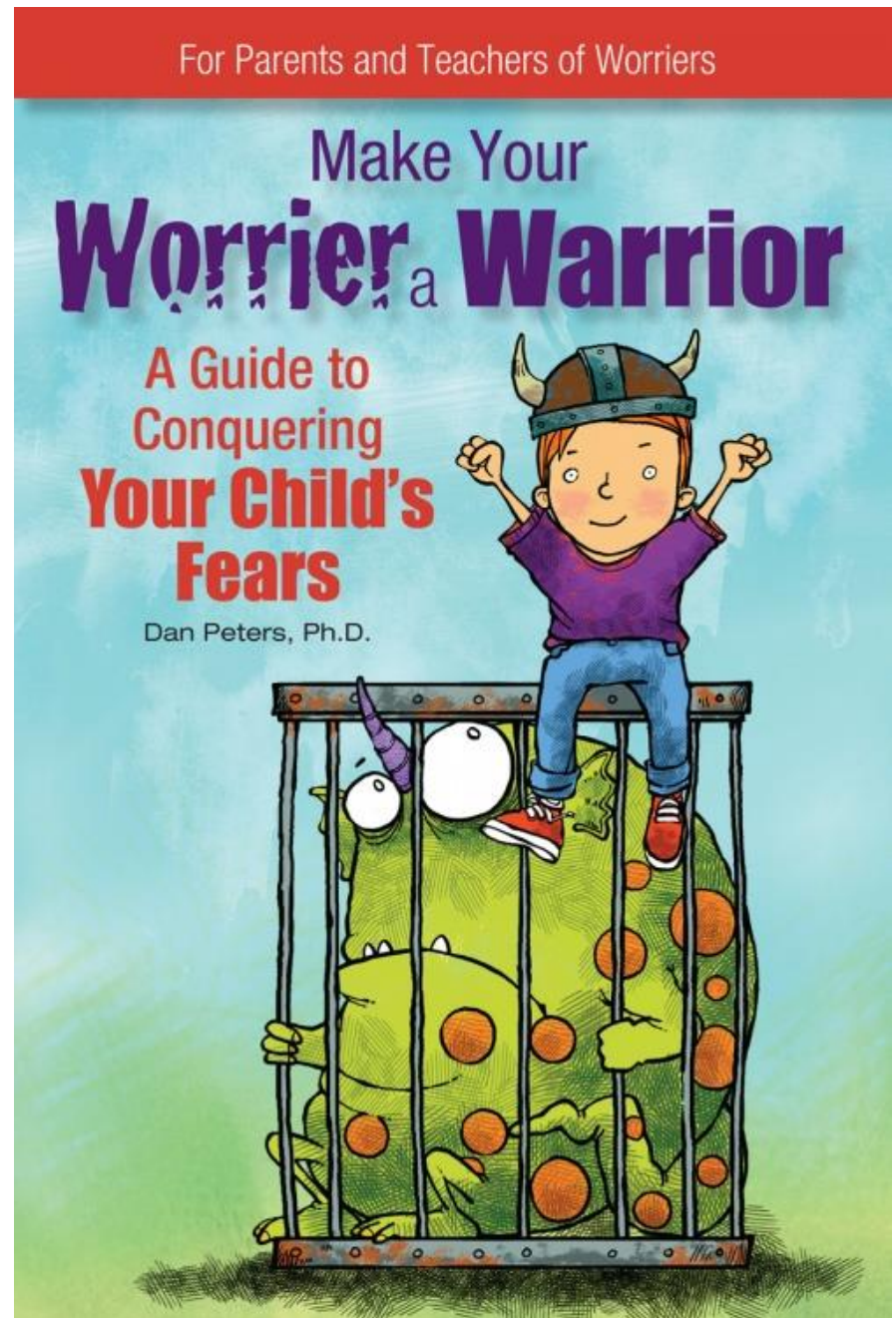
All information taken from this amazing book:

MAKE YOUR WORRIER A WARRIOR

A GUIDE TO CONQUERING YOUR CHILD'S FEARS BY DAN PETERS, PH.D.

ALSO CHECK OUT:

*FROM WORRIER TO WARRIOR:
A GUIDE TO CONQUERING YOUR FEARS
(FOR KIDS & TEENS)*



What do fear and anxiety do to your body?



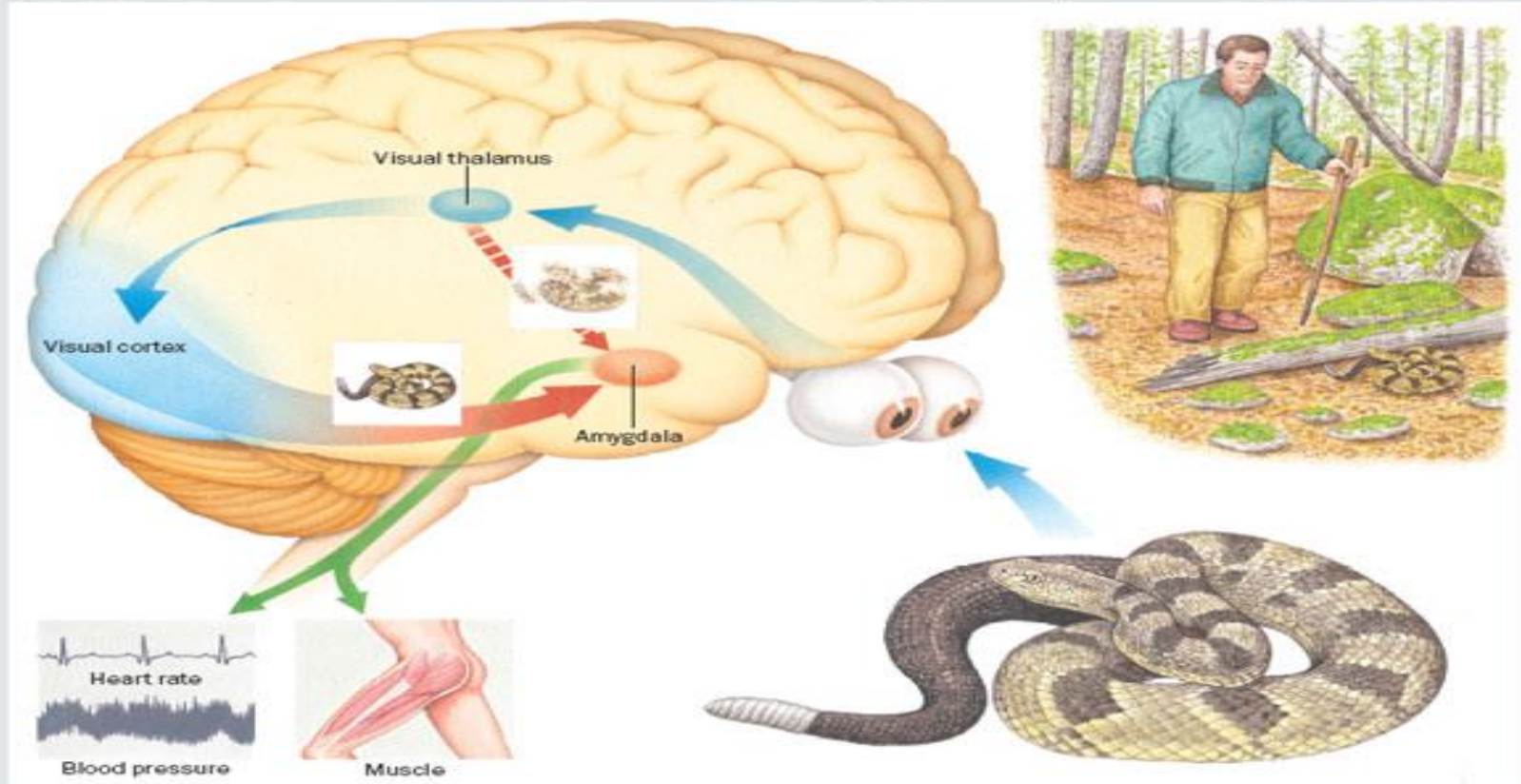
[The Chemistry of Fear](#)

Why does anxiety effect your body?

The Fear Response

Cortical and subcortical pathways in the brain may bring about a fearful response to a snake on a hiker's path. Visual stimuli are first processed by the thalamus, which passes rough, almost archetypal, information to the amygdala (red). This quick transmission allows the brain to respond to the possible danger (green). Meanwhile the visual cortex also receives sig-

nals from the thalamus and, with more sophistication and more time, determines that there is a snake on the path (blue). This information is relayed to the amygdala, causing heart rate and blood pressure to increase and muscles to contract. If, however, the cortex had determined that the object was not a snake, the message to the amygdala would quell the fear response.



What does this do to you physically?

Quick version...the amygdala sends messages to the rest of our body. They produce adrenaline so that we can choose to fight or flight!

While the amygdala is fully developed at birth, the prefrontal cortex(helps with the planning phase) does not mature until early adulthood. Because of this, children and adolescents do not always make rational decisions and cannot always control their emotions.

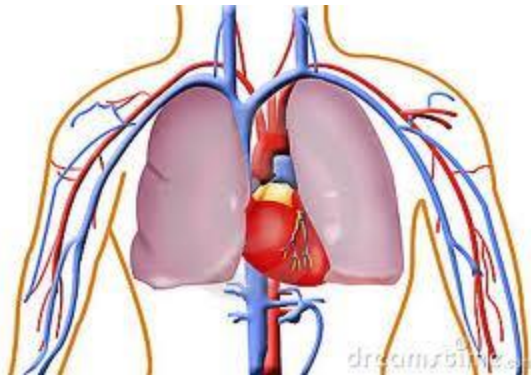
[Anatomy of Anxiety](#)

Adrenaline Effects from A-Z

- blurred or distorted vision
- chest pain
- choking sensations
- clenched teeth
- cold hands and feet
- diarrhea
- dizziness
- dry mouth
- easily startled
- hyper-vigilant
- faintness
- fatigue
- feelings of going crazy
- fidgetiness
- headache
- holding one's breath
- hot or cold flashes
- hyperventilation
- jumpiness
- loss of appetite
- loss of balance
- lump in throat
- muscle aches
- muscle tension
- muscle weakness
- nausea
- numbness
- palpitations
- rapid heart rate
- restlessness
- shakiness
- shallow breathing
- shortness of breath
- skin problems
- smothering sensation
- stomach pain
- tight chest
- tingling sensation
- trembling
- trouble swallowing
- tunnel vision
- unsteady feeling
- urinary frequency
- urinary or bowel emergency
- vomiting
- weakness

In Your Heart and Lungs

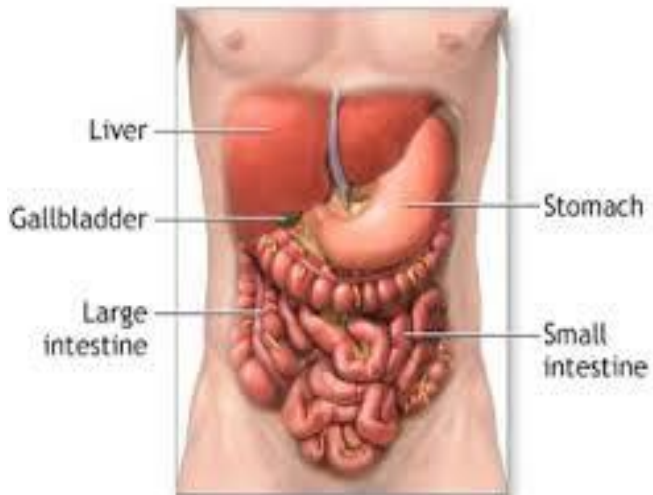
- Beats faster
- Chest gets tight
- Breathe faster



This occurs so that you can fight and run better – your body speeds up your heart and lungs in order to send more blood into your muscles. Makes the muscles stronger!

In Your Stomach

- Stomach pain
 - Nausea
 - Diarrhea
- This happens because much of your blood leaves your stomach and intestines and pumps into your heart, your lungs and your muscles in case it is needed to help you run and fight!

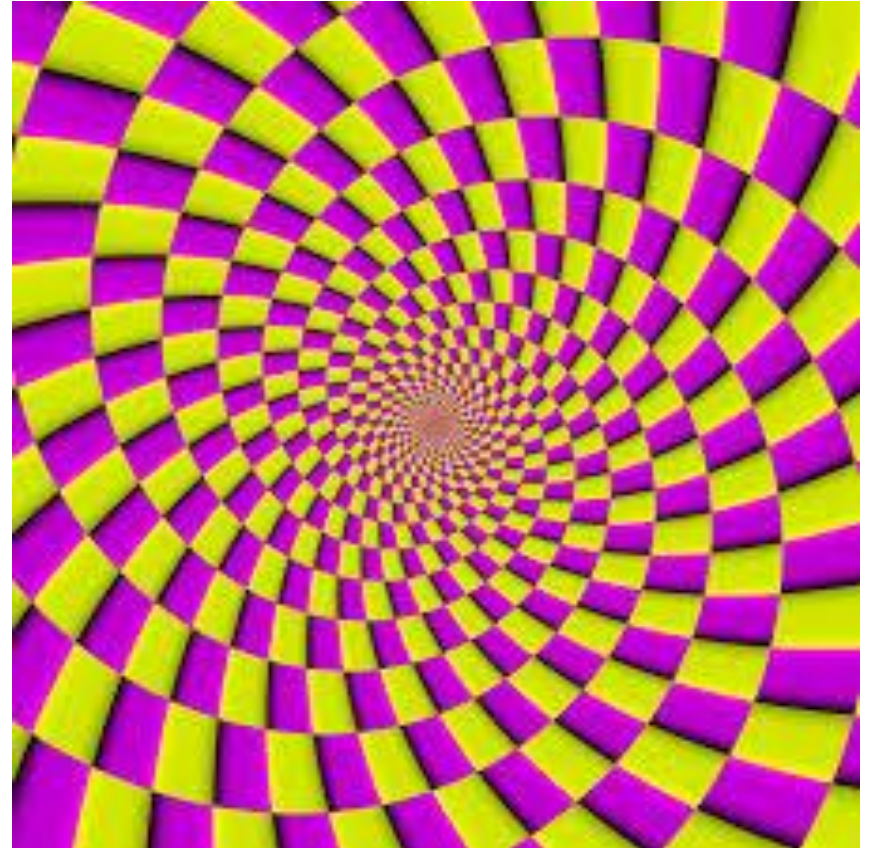


In Your Brain

- Light-Headed
- Dizzy
- Feelings like you're going to faint, you're going crazy or you're losing control

WHY???

Your blood has to leave your brain to get to your heart, lungs and muscles!



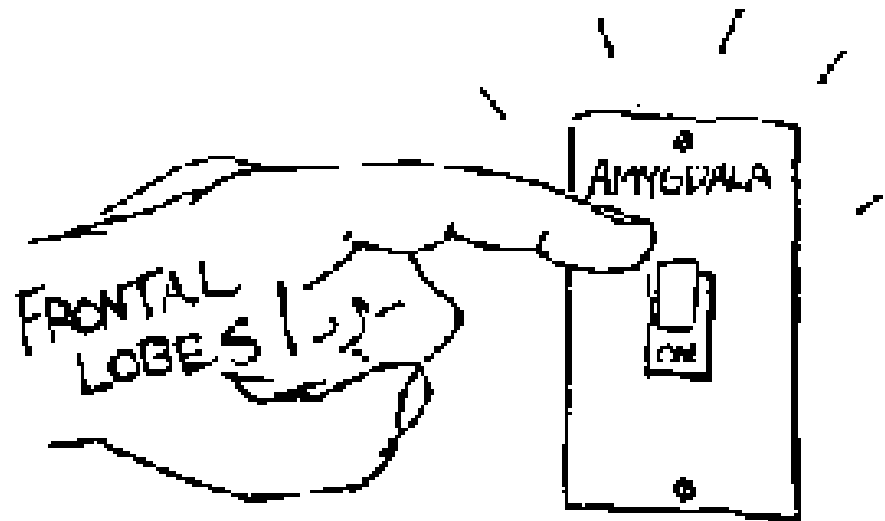
In Your Arms and Legs

- Sweating
 - Cold Hands
 - Numbness
 - Shaking
 - Trembling
 - Muscle Tenseness
 - Pain
- Your blood leaves your skin so that you won't bleed as much if you get hurt!

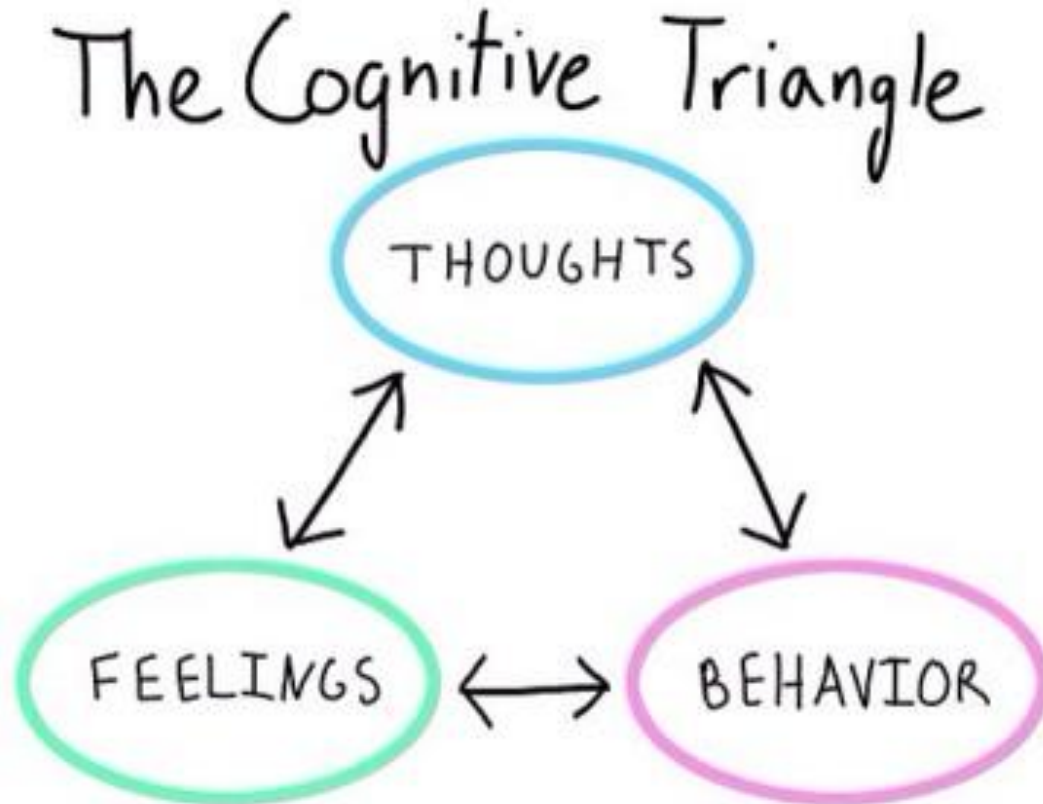


How can we tame the Worry Monster?

We can understand how the Worry Monster turns on our emotional brain. We can tame the Worry Monster by training ourselves to turn off our emotional brain.



Thoughts determine our emotions and our behaviors



How Can We Start to Deal with the Worry Monster?

- Face the Worry Monster – don't avoid him or he will become more firmly rooted.
- Don't let the Worry Monster shoot the adrenaline!



Worriers make **thinking errors**
by either
jumping to conclusions about negative
events
OR
blowing things out of proportion.

Let's look at some examples...

How Are These Thinking Errors Verbalized?

- They think I'm stupid.
- *I never do things right. I always blow it!*
- I never get picked to be a partner.
- *I shouldn't make any mistakes.*
- What will people think if I mess up?
- *I know the teacher said I did a good job, but she corrected two of my answers, so she really didn't mean it.*
- I can't go on the field trip without you. What if I get lost and they leave without me?
- What if burglars break into my house and take me?
- They wouldn't let me lead the line walking into the museum, so the whole trip was ruined.
- *I know she said she liked what I was wearing, but she was laughing with Julie after she looked at me.*
- If I don't get a good grade on this, I will never get into a college.
- *She cancelled the party because she didn't want me there.*

What are the three types of strategies we can use to outwit the Worry Monster?

Cognitive strategies

Thinking strategies – thoughts determine our behaviors and our emotions

Mindfulness strategies

Strategies for living in the present – past can cause depression and future can cause anxiety

Behavioral interventions

Changing behaviors by making systematic changes to one's environment – changing behaviors changes thinking and feelings, too



Time to Outwit the Worry Monster by Using a Cognitive(Thinking) Strategy

1. Identify the thought
2. Challenge the thought
3. Modify the thought
4. Replace the thought

1. Identify the Thought



- “What am I thinking about? What is my thinking error? Is it that I’m scared I’m going to fail the test?”

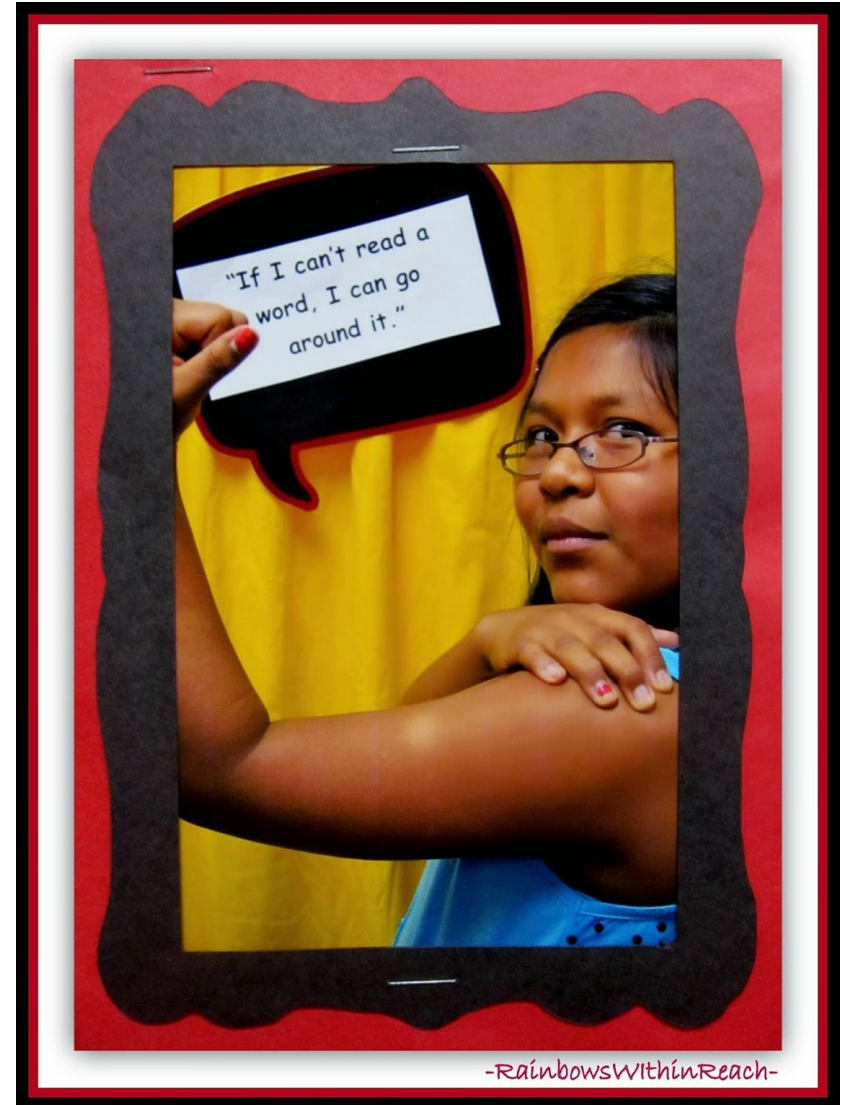
2. Challenge the Thought

- “Is it true that I always fail? Do I have evidence to support that I always fail?”



3. Modify the Thought

- “The test is going to be hard, but I am prepared. I usually get nervous before reading tests but generally do pretty well.”



4. Replace the Thought

- “I am prepared. I will try my best and will do fine.”



Here's a Way to Write it Down

List of Worries

Worry	What the Worry Monster Tells Me
Being left alone	I might get left at school. Something bad might happen to my mom.
Taking tests	What if I forget everything? What if I fail?

Modified Thoughts

Old Thought(Worry Monster)	New Thought
I might get left at school.	I have never been left before.
Something bad might happen to my mom.	My mom is strong and can take care of herself.
What if I forget everything?	I never forget everything.
What if I fail?	I studied for the test. So what if I fail?

Turning Down the Volume

- These four steps will turn down the small amygdala and will turn up the BIG frontal lobes. Adrenaline won't surge and blood will stay in the brain.
- You've stomped on the Worry Monster!!



Thinking strategies

MORE COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

Try some other cognitive strategies

1. Positive self-talk
2. Worry time
3. Worry box
4. And then what?
5. Planning for worst case scenario

Positive self talk	Replace a fear talk from the Worry Monster with a positive talk.
Worry time	Set aside a fifteen minute block every day to allow for your worrying (and maybe problem solving).
Worry box	Put worries on paper and put them into a box – decorate it. Look at it once in a while to see if the worries were worth worrying about.
And then what?	Have your child share the worry. Ask “And then what?” until you get to the underlying issue.
Planning for worst case scenario	What is the worst case scenario if you do not get the lead in the play?

Living in the present

MINDFULNESS STRATEGIES

Mindfulness Strategies

1. Stay in the present
2. Letting thoughts pass
3. Controlling breathing

Stay in the present	Review all of the worries. Most often they reside in the future. We need to keep our brain prepared for right now. "...if you are worrying and there's something you can do about the situation, then do something about it and stop worrying. If you are worrying and there's nothing you can do about it, then there's no point in worrying because there's nothing you can do about it."
Letting thoughts pass	Teach child to notice thought and let it pass without getting attached to it. For instance, child says, "I'm afraid you will not come back to pick me up". Have child say, "Hmmm...that's interesting because my mom always picks me up. She has never forgotten." Even have them say it with a funny accent.
Controlling breathing	Inhale and exhale. Put your hand on your stomach to make sure you are doing both. Try a count of 6. In and out. This keeps the blood in our brain.

Changing behaviors by making systematic changes to one's environment

BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS

Behavioral Interventions

Practice, practice, practice!

1. Systematic desensitization, success ladders and baby steps
2. Behavioral rehearsal
3. Response inhibition
4. Fake it to make it

Systematic desensitization, success ladders and baby steps	Do all of the steps from A to Z without rushing, use expectant praise before each step. (Example in next slide)
Behavioral rehearsal	Do it until you're bored! Walk, drive over bridges until you're so bored you're not anxious.
Response inhibition – primarily for OCD	Progressively decrease number of times an action is done or set timer for how long one can go without doing a repetitive action, increasing time gradually.
Fake it to make it	Say, "I want you to pretend that you are going to have fun. Just pretend. Fake it. I'll give you a reward if you can fake it. If you can make me think that you are having fun or that you are not afraid, I'll let you/get you..."

Success Ladder Example – Fear of Dogs

Suggested that parents try it with kids!

Level of Discomfort	Goals
10+	Go to a public place with dogs that are allowed to play off leash.
10	Go to another friend's house with dogs.
9	Go to a friend's house with dogs roaming around.
8	Get close to a dog that is off leash.
7	Be far away from a dog that is off leash.
6	Pet a dog of choice that is on a leash.
5	See dogs more closely at an animal rescue or a dog park.
4	See dogs at a distance at an animal rescue or a dog park.
3	Be at a friend's house with a dog off leash outside or in another room.
2	Watch someone walking a dog on a leash.
2	Look at a book on dogs.

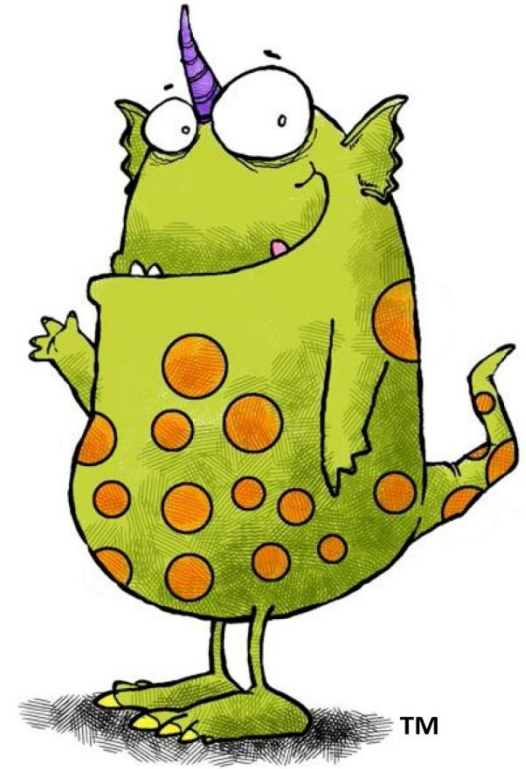
Behavioral Interventions

Practice, practice, practice!

5. Pleasure predicting
6. Taking a risk
7. Prescribing failure

Pleasure predicting	Instead of anticipating what will go wrong, think “on a scale of 1-10, how awful is the event going to be once I get there?” (10 is great). Once the event is over, talk about what number it was. Discuss the difference.
Taking a risk – especially for perfectionists	Model taking risks where you don’t end up the best. Encourage your student/child to try things that do not come naturally. Be okay with okay, not perfect.
Prescribing failure – also good for perfectionists	Challenge your child to do something less than perfect and then understand that the world will not crash down! Let them know they will survive. Have fun brainstorming a list of ways to make mistakes or failures – challenge your child to invite a friend over when you both know he/she is busy, have him/her spill milk on his/her clothes at lunch. Etc.

The Worry Monster is sneaky,



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**BUT HE IS ALSO PREDICTABLE!
MAKE A PLAN AND TAME HIM!**

