

Book review

Outsmarting Worry

An older kid's guide to managing anxiety

Category: Book Reviews / Children & Youth

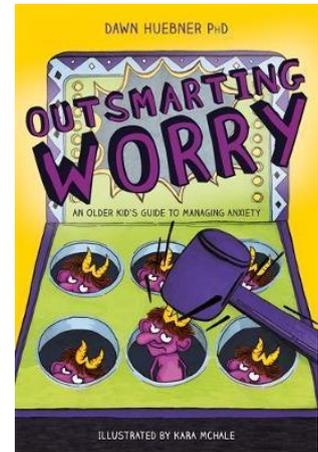
Author: Dawn Huebner, Illustrated by Kara McHale

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Publisher: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, UK

ISBN: 9781785927829

Audience: For Youth, For Schools & Education



Summary: A book for parents and children (9-13 years) with strategies to help with worries and anxiety

The author, Dawn Huebner, is a clinical psychologist who specialises in the treatment of anxiety in children. In this book, she does a great job of sharing some of the therapeutic strategies grounded in cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) in a practical, easy-to-read and “light” way. The book is for 9–13-year-olds and is well pitched for this age group.

I really like Huebner's note to parents at the beginning of the book where she provides a great normalising summary, though I'm not sure this transfers through to the children reading it. Huebner asks parents to be their children's “best coach and guide” and I fully advocate this. She goes on to ask parents to be patient and persistent – there really isn't a quick fix to overcoming anxiety and small steps are the best approach.

So, if you asked me, “do you think this book would help a 9–13-year-old with their worry and anxiety?” my answer would be “yes”. But as Huebner says, read it with your child, stay with them and support them with remembering the strategies and putting it all into practice.

My favourite bits:

- The character illustrations are cheeky and fun.
- The strategies are clear and it offers some new advice I hadn't come across before, such as when a worry occurs, ask ‘where's the evidence?’ This is a really good question to bring things into perspective.

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- I enjoyed her analogies, for example “worry is like a barking dog”. We can make a barking dog mean so many things, but it may not mean anything at all. Huebner says to “observe it, accept it and let it be.” This is superbly simple and it stops the inner dialogue in its tracks. Because, as she says, “the more you fight a thought or a feeling, the more it stays stuck. But if you take a step back and just... observe it... it becomes less powerful, less like something you need to do something about”.
- I especially like the section “Worry in Disguise” where she looks at avoidance strategies (my words, not hers). It’s important kids and parents know sometimes worry is easy to recognise in our own children because we can read them well enough or they’re in tune with their emotions and honest about them. However, other kids (and adults) make worry or anxiety look like something else – excuses, boredom or anger. Worry has many faces and it’s great to see a light shone on the many justifications for avoiding.

I can see I’d work through this book with my own kids and pass it on to other families. Opportunities to talk about worries are always going to get a thumbs up from me. Worries and anxiety are normal as long as they don’t stop us doing things. Sometimes we’ve just got to ‘take ourselves on’, and this book gives oodles of good strategies to help do this.

Reviewed by Anna Mowat, who works predominantly as part of the All Right? Wellbeing campaign in Otautahi, where she is based. She also delivers Incredible Years parenting courses for the Ministry of Education and is currently working on a Cure Kids research project to create support for parents whose children have emotional regulation issues.

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