

# The Anxiety Activity Book

## FOR KIDS



**Ascension EAP**

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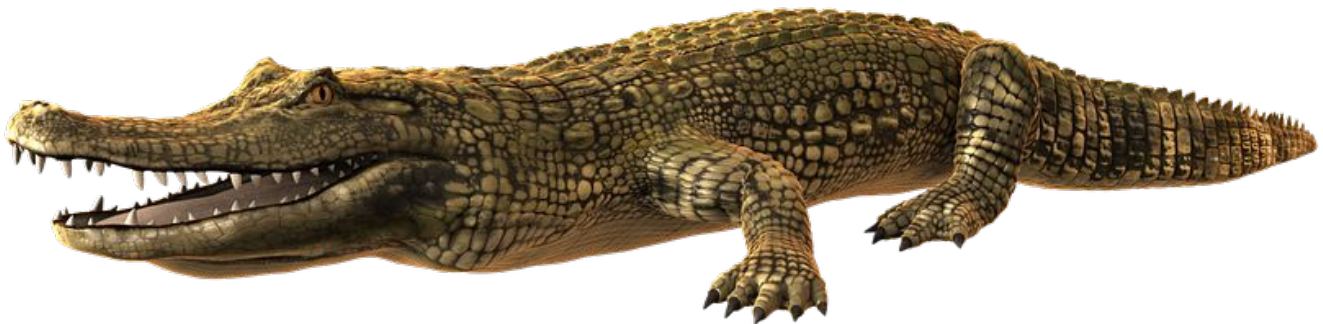
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## What Is Anxiety?

Have you heard the word “anxiety” before? How about “worried,” “nervous,” or “afraid?” All of those words are FEELINGS (also known as “emotions”). Other types of feelings include mad, sad, or glad. Can you think of a few other feeling words? Draw or write them here:

Though the feeling of anxiety might be uncomfortable, it really is trying to help! When we are faced with something dangerous or scary, our body reacts immediately! Our blood pumps faster, our eyes get bigger, our breathing gets faster, and our muscles get tense. We’re ready to face that man-eating crocodile! --or at least run away! Anxiety is an emotion, but it’s also a way that your body responds to danger.



Ok, so now you know that anxiety is a feeling, but it’s also your body’s reaction to danger. There’s one more part to anxiety--thoughts. You’ve heard the saying, “think happy thoughts”--and that is good advice, but sometimes it’s hard to think happy thoughts. Sometimes our thoughts get stuck on sad, bad or negative things, and it’s hard to get rid of them. When a person feels anxiety in their emotions and their body, they might also notice that they’ve become stuck on negative thoughts.

## Taming Anxiety

Now that you know what anxiety is, I'm wondering if you have ever felt anxiety. If you are a human being, then you probably have! Anxiety is normal, and everyone feels it sometimes. Some people feel it too strongly, too often, and it begins to cause problems in their life. Anxiety can be really helpful when you're lost in a new place and need to find your parent, but not so helpful when it's time to go to school and you feel like you need to run away.



This Anxiety Activity Book is full of information and tools to help you get a handle on anxiety that might be causing problems in your life. I need to warn you though--it's pretty much impossible to make anxiety go away completely. You still need it in dangerous situations! But you can learn to tame anxiety so that it doesn't take control in your life.

Draw a picture or write a paragraph about what your life will be like when anxiety doesn't bother you anymore. Use lots of details!

- What would you do?
- What would you see and hear?
- How would you feel?
- What would you think?

A large, empty, light gray rounded rectangle with a thin black border, intended for a drawing or written response.

## You Are Not Anxiety

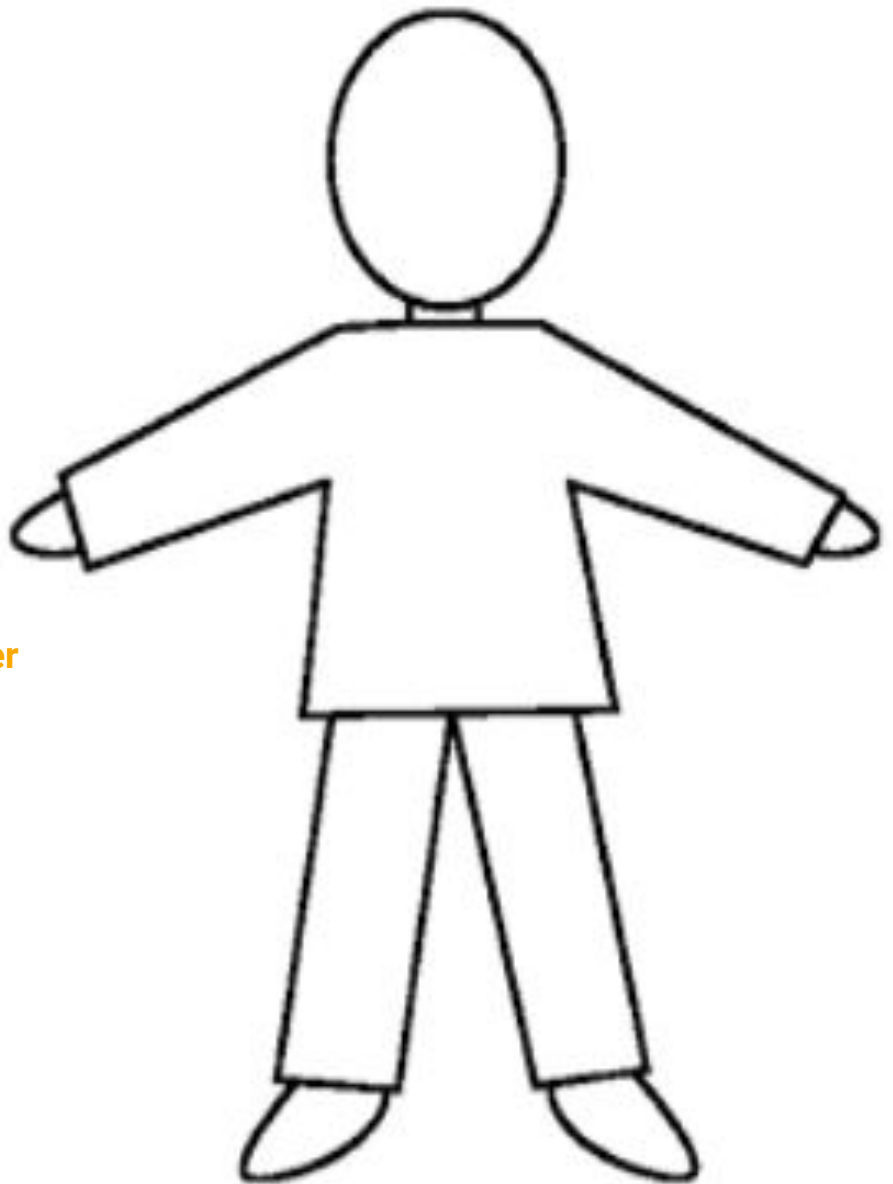
Anxiety is a thing you HAVE in your life; it is not who you ARE. Some people think of anxiety like a roaring lion, others like a stormy sea. Draw a picture or write a poem about the anxiety that bothers you.

## Fight or Flight

Remember when we talked about how anxiety is emotions, but also negative thinking and your body's reaction to danger? Well let's talk a little bit more about that "body's reaction to danger" part. Everyone has a "fight or flight" system that fires when there is threat or danger, but everyone's reactions are a little different.

Some common symptoms of the fight or flight system include:

- ☐ **Shaking**
- ☐ **Sweating/"cold sweats"**
- ☐ **Hard to breathe/fast breathing**
- ☐ **Lightheaded/tingling**
- ☐ **Tightness in chest, neck, head and jaw**
- ☐ **Jittery or on edge**
- ☐ **Can't concentrate/remember information**
- ☐ **Can't stop thinking that something bad will happen/did happen**
- ☐ **Feeling of doom**
- ☐ **Running away/avoiding**
- ☐ **Arguing or fighting**



On this person, draw the symptoms you've experienced:

## Fight or Flight Log

It is helpful when we can recognize when our fight or flight system is activated so that we can help our body, mind and emotions relax. It's hard to do that when we don't even know it's happening! So here's a challenge: for the next several days, keep track of when you notice your fight or flight system firing. Try to notice what your body feels like, what you are thinking about, and what you do when that happens. Also notice what caused your fight or flight to fire in the first place.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
What happened?					
How my body felt:					
What I thought:					
What I did:					

There are no right or wrong answers. This activity is just about helping you to NOTICE what is happening, not really change anything just yet. We'll talk about that next.



## Rest & Digest--Part 1



I have some good news for you! The fight or flight system isn't the only sheriff in town. Oh no! The rest & digest system also comes into play. This system puts the brakes on, and tries to get everything to just calm down! When your rest & digest system is at work, you will feel more at ease, peaceful and calm. You will be able to drift off to sleep at night, and wake up in the morning refreshed.

An active rest & digest system means your immune system is working. That means you fight off disease and germs pretty well. Your digestion will work too, which is getting nutrients from the food you eat into the bones, muscles, tissues and glands that need it.

Ahh, that all sounds great, doesn't it? But the problem is that our anxiety is so LOUD and OBNOXIOUS that the rest & digest system doesn't have a chance! Or does it?

Here are some things you can do to activate your rest & digest system, and get your anxiety to quiet down. Practice these activities as often as you can.

### Take Deep Breaths

Breathe deep into your belly, filling it like a balloon. Hold it there! Just a bit longer. Ok now release all that air, real slowly. Now just pause for a second. Ok, do it again. Fill your balloon, hold it hold it, release it slowly. Pause again. Yea! You got the hang of it!



### Drop It Low

Drop your shoulders down as far as they will go. Do you feel stretching in your chest? Pull your shoulders back and open that chest wide. Feel what it's like to breathe with everything so open. If this feels good to you, do it a lot. I mean, a real lot.



## Rest & Digest Part 2

### 5-4-3-2-1

Draw or list each of the following:

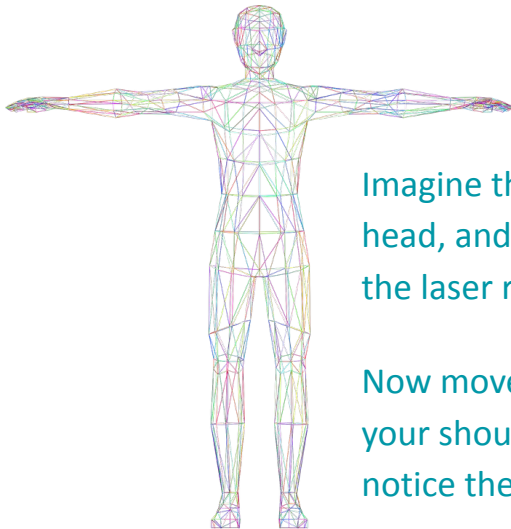
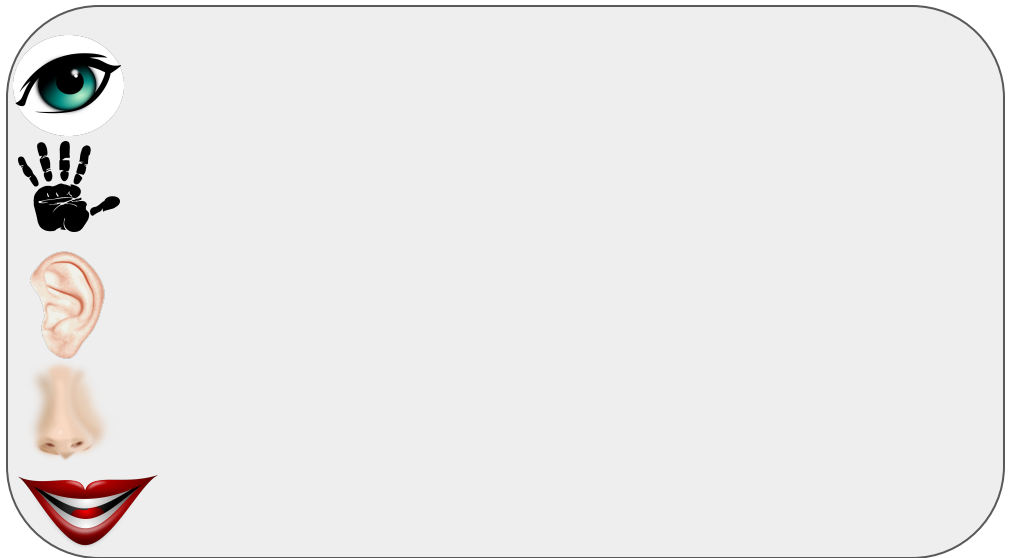
5 things you can see.

4 things you can feel.

3 things you can hear.

2 things you can smell.

1 thing you can taste.



### Body Scan

Imagine there is a laser pointing at your body. Start at the top of your head, and move that laser to your forehead, cheeks, and jaw. Imagine that the laser relaxes every muscle it touches.

Now move the laser down your neck--front and back. Move the laser to your shoulder, down your arm, into your hand and each finger. Do you notice the relaxation? Now do the other shoulder, arm, hand and fingers.

Next move your laser back up to your neck, and let it move slowly down your spine, relaxing everything as it goes. Move that laser to your hip, down your leg, knee, calf, and ankle. Now move it to the other hip, down your leg, knee, calf and ankle. You're doing great!

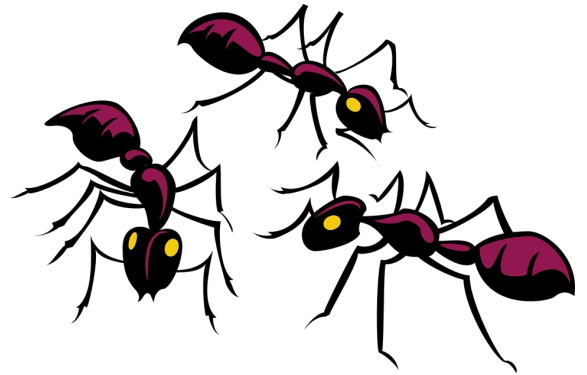
Ok, now move your laser to your feet. Move that laser around one foot, relaxing each part as you go. Then move it to the other foot, relaxing each part as you go. You got it!

Now, do a quick full body scan. Do you notice any places that need your relaxation laser just a little more? Focus on that place just a minute longer, and let the muscles release and relax as you point your laser on it. How does that feel? Are you more relaxed now than before you started? Nice work!

## Squashing ANTs--Part 1

Do you know what ANTs are? No, not the creepy crawly kind--we all know what THOSE are! I'm talking about

Automatic  
Negative  
Thoughts



A big part of anxiety is the thoughts we think. Sometimes we get stuck in a negative thought loop, and we just can't make it stop! Those thoughts are ANTs--Automatic Negative Thoughts. Ants are fun to watch in nature, but ANTs are not fun to have stuck in your head, so let's talk about some ways to get rid of them.

The first thing we have to do is figure out WHAT ANTs are bothering us. Here is a list of common ANTs. Check the ones that bother you, and then add some of your own:

- ☐ I'm stupid.
- ☐ I'm ugly.
- ☐ No one likes me.
- ☐ People will laugh at me.
- ☐ Everyone is better than me.
- ☐ I will mess up or do terrible.
- ☐ If I go to certain places, I could vomit.
- ☐ Dogs/snakes/spiders/bugs/other things are dangerous.
- ☐ It is too scary to try new things or go new places; I'd rather not.
- ☐ People I don't know could hurt me, so it's better if I avoid them.
- ☐ If I am by myself, something terrible will happen.
- ☐ When I eat certain foods I could choke and die.
- ☐ My parent/caregiver will disappear or leave me, so I don't like to be away from them.
- ☐ I am afraid to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- ☐ Write your own:
- ☐ Write your own:



## Squashing ANTs--Part 2

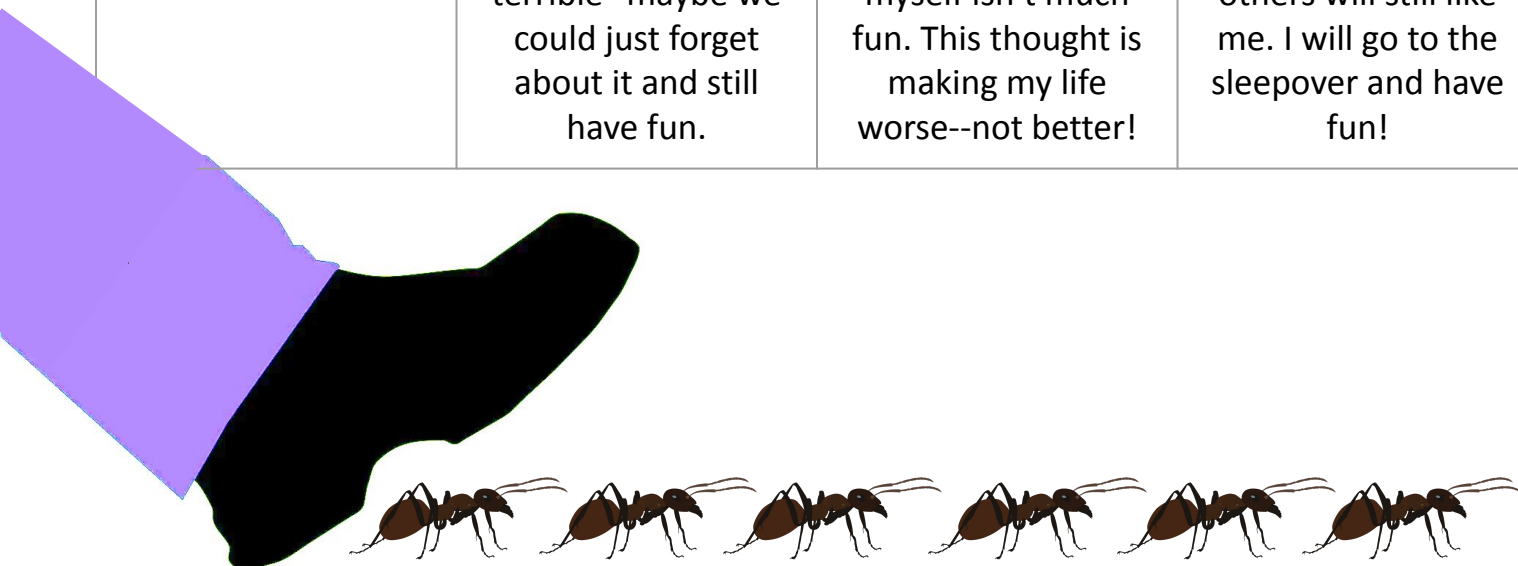
Now that you have a better idea of what your ANTs might be, it's time to start squashing them! One way to do that is to ask ourselves 2 questions:

**1). Is this thought true? (Like, really really 100% true?)**

**2). Is this thought helpful?**

If you answered NO to either of these questions, then we need to squash that ANT by coming up with a new thought that is more true, and more helpful. Let me give you an example of how this works.

ANT	Is it 100% true?	Is it helpful?	New true/helpful thought
"I can't go to the sleepover! What if I fart and everyone laughs at me? That would be TERRIBLE!"	I'm not 100% sure that I would fart--maybe I won't. It's not 100% true that everyone would laugh at me--maybe some people wouldn't. It's not 100% true that it would be terrible--maybe we could just forget about it and still have fun.	The thought "I could fart" is causing anxiety that makes me avoid the sleepover. Maybe this will help me avoid being embarrassed at the sleepover, but staying home by myself isn't much fun. This thought is making my life worse--not better!	If I fart at the sleepover people may laugh, and I can laugh too! Farting is funny and everyone does it! I remember a time when someone else farted, and I still like that person, so I'm sure others will still like me. I will go to the sleepover and have fun!



## Squashing ANTs Activity

Now it's your turn. Use the same ANTs you identified before, and decide if thinking those things are true and helpful. If not, come up with new thoughts that ARE true and helpful.

ANT	Is it 100% true?	Is it helpful?	New true/helpful thought
	YES / NO (circle one)	YES / NO (circle one)	
	YES / NO (circle one)	YES / NO (circle one)	
	YES / NO (circle one)	YES / NO (circle one)	
	YES / NO (circle one)	YES / NO (circle one)	

## Red Light, Green Light

One thing we didn't talk about yet is how **STRONG** we feel anxiety. There are some things that might make us a little nervous--like walking on slippery ice, and other things that make us **EXTREMELY ANXIOUS**, like watching a really scary movie.

It's important to recognize how **STRONG** the anxiety is, so that we know when we can challenge ourselves to push through uncomfortable feelings of anxiety (which is a very brave and healthy thing to do!), versus becoming overwhelmed by anxiety so that our brain shuts down and it feels like we lost control. (This is not so great.)



Think about anxiety like a red light, yellow light, or green light. **The red light is the STOP light.** When you are on the red light, it means the situation is too challenging, and all you can think about is starting a fight or running away.



**The yellow light is the CHALLENGING, BUT I CAN DO IT light.** This means you are not comfortable in the situation, but you know how to flip on your rest and digest system, and squash ANTs, so that you are in control, and not your anxiety.



**The green light is the EASY light.** Maybe you feel just a little bit of anxiety, but you can handle the situation with ease.



## Red Light, Green Light Matching Game

For each item below, think about how anxious you would feel, and draw a line to the best color light.

- ★ Seeing a spider
- ★ You have to walk in the dark basement alone
- ★ Petting a dog
- ★ Taking a test
- ★ You are at a party and don't know anyone
- ★ You are home alone
- ★ You have to give a speech in front of your class
- ★ You feel sick
- ★ It's time to go to school
- ★ Something feels stuck in your throat.
- ★ You are at the store and can't find your parent
- ★ You don't know how to do your homework
- ★ You have to touch a dirty door knob



## Red Light, Green Light--Write or Draw

If you completed the activity on the last page, you have already had some practice in deciding how INTENSE (strong or weak) anxiety may feel to you in different situations. Now we're going to take our skills one step further.

First, think of some **green light** activities or situations that might cause you a little anxiety, but that you can handle pretty well. Write or draw those here:

Next, think of some **yellow light** activities or situations that may be very challenging for you, but you can handle it by flipping on your rest & digest system, and squashing ANTs. Write or draw those here:

Last, think of some **red light** activities or situations that you think might cause so much anxiety, that even after you practice your new skills, you will probably still feel out of control. Write or draw those here:



## Facing Fears--Part 1

Imagine what it would be like to climb a mountain. You have to start at the bottom, and work your way up. The farther up you go the harder it becomes as the mountain becomes more steep and your body becomes more tired. On the other hand, climbing the mountain also becomes easier in some ways, because you've had some practice in those tricky places, and you are getting better and better at navigating the climb. When you get too tired, you may need to stop and rest for awhile. Once you get some strength back, you keep going--higher and higher and higher until... YOU MADE IT! That was a difficult journey! How do you feel?



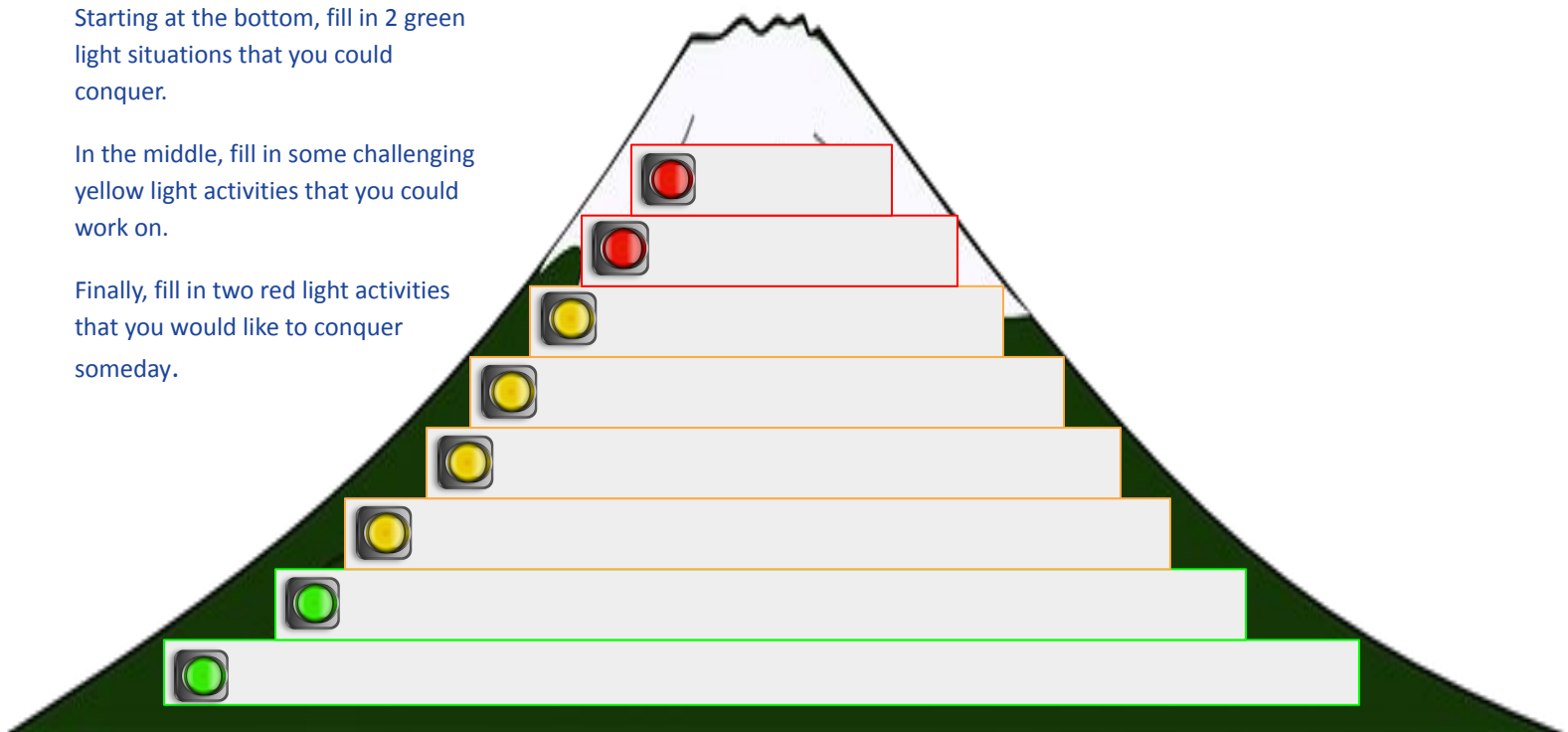
Draw yourself climbing the mountain

In some ways conquering anxiety is like climbing a mountain. The steps become more challenging as you go, but the higher you go the more ready you will feel to take the next step.

Starting at the bottom, fill in 2 green light situations that you could conquer.

In the middle, fill in some challenging yellow light activities that you could work on.

Finally, fill in two red light activities that you would like to conquer someday.



## Facing Fears--Part 2

You have made all your preparations. It is time to climb the mountain; it is time to face your fears. **You got this.**

Here are a few tips for your journey:

- ↑ **Start small.** The more in shape you become, the faster you can climb the mountain, but the same is true for conquering anxiety. Remember to challenge yourself, but avoid becoming overwhelmed.
- ↑ **Decide how long you will practice the activity.** Once you meet that goal, can you increase the time?
- ↑ **Celebrate each milestone.** This is hard work, and you are doing it!
- ↑ **Don't give up!** You can take breaks and rest for a little bit, but don't stop. Keep trying, even when the work gets really hard. You can do it!



Note each milestone achieved with its date below. Write a word or note about what each one meant to you.

## It's a Miracle!

Now you have lots of skills and ideas to conquer anxiety so that it doesn't have control in your life anymore. Remember, you may never be able to get rid of anxiety COMPLETELY. Everyone feels anxiety SOMETIMES, but you are learning how to tame it so that it will still help you stay safe in dangerous situations, but isn't so out-of-control that it stops you from doing fun things. Even though you've already learned a lot about anxiety, there are still a few more things you can do to conquer anxiety.

Do you know that your imagination is a powerful tool? When you imagine overcoming anxiety, you are more likely to do it, and that's what these next activities are all about--using your imagination to conquer anxiety. The first activity is called "It's a Miracle!" Here's how it works. You pick a situation where something bad happens, then you say "but it's a miracle" and come up with a happy ending to the situation. Here's an example:

I threw up at school, but...

**IT'S A MIRACLE!**

The puke turned to rainbows and evaporated in  
the air.



Finish the miracles below. Draw or write your answers.

I fell off my bike and scraped my knee,  
but...

**IT'S A MIRACLE!**

I spilled my entire lunch on my  
principal's lap, but...

**IT'S A MIRACLE!**

## It's a Miracle!--Part 2

Now it's your turn! Think of your own worst-case scenarios, and then imagine your miracle. Remember, this is about using your imagination, so your miracles can be crazy, silly, or amazing. The point is that something good happens in the end. You know how to do it! Unleash your creativity!

Bad Situation:

**BUT IT'S A MIRACLE!**



Bad Situation:

**BUT IT'S A MIRACLE!**



## My Hero



Everyone knows that a hero has courage, strength, and noble qualities. But what about you? Do you have courage? Strength? Noble qualities? If you've been working on conquering your anxiety then I am happy to tell you that you have all of the above!

For this next activity you are going to make a superhero version of yourself. This superhero is going to be you, but with all your best features turned up to epic proportions. Do you want superhuman strength, invisibility, or fearless bravery? No problem! This is your hero, so have fun with it.

Hero name:

Arch nemesis (what  
your hero battles):

Awesome qualities (how  
your hero acts, even when  
no one is watching):

Draw a picture of your hero:

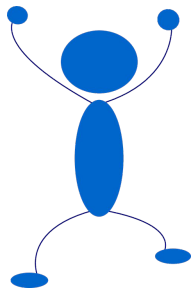
Super abilities (what your hero can do):

Now make a comic strip of your hero battling their nemesis and saving the day.

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**In what ways are you like your hero?**

## That's a Wrap!



Way to go! I am so impressed that you completed this whole Anxiety Activity Book. You stuck in there even when the work got hard, even when it wasn't fun, even though you probably had other stuff to do, but you DIDN'T QUIT! That is amazing, and don't let anyone tell you different. How do you feel?

Now that you've finished this book, what else do you need? Do you need to keep practicing taming your fight or flight system and flipping on your rest & digest system? Do you need to keep practicing squashing ANTs? Do you need to keep conquering your anxiety mountain? If you're like most people, then the answer is YES to all of the above.



For those of us who sometimes have trouble with anxiety, we have to keep practicing our anxiety-taming skills or the anxiety comes back. The good news is that the more we practice, the less the anxiety comes back, and the easier it is to make it settle down when it does show up. The bottom line is that we can't just quit. Anxiety is something that we have to conquer everyday. And that's ok!



If you think you might need more help conquering anxiety, that's ok too. Talk to your parent or a counselor about your anxiety, and ask them if they can help you stay on track in practicing your skills and climbing your mountain. This is hard work, but it's easier if you work on it with someone else. You've heard the saying, "Two heads are better than one."

**Way to go kid!**  
**I'm so proud of you!**