

The Anxiety Activity Book

FOR TEENS



Ascension EAP

www.ascensionWIEAP.org

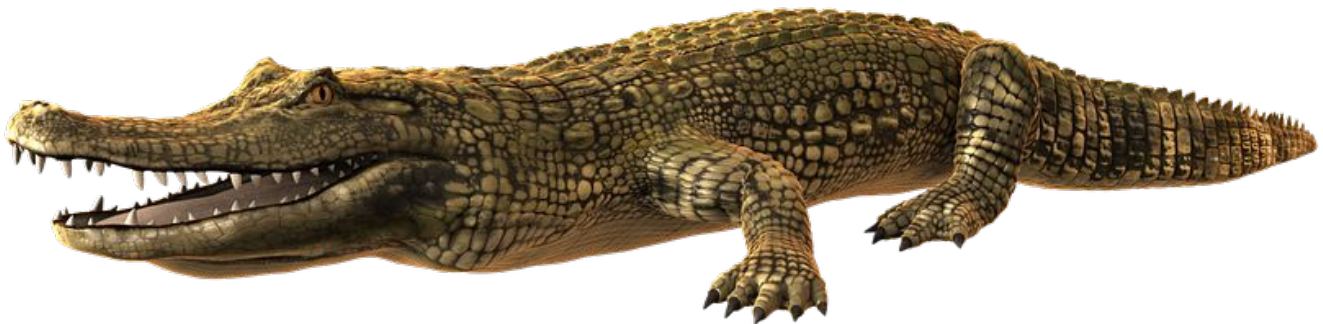
Table of Contents

What is Anxiety?	Pg. 3
Taming Anxiety	Pg. 4
You Are Not Anxiety	Pg. 5
Fight or Flight	Pg. 6
Fight or Flight Log	Pg. 7
Rest & Digest--Part 1	Pg. 8
Rest & Digest--Part 2	Pg. 9
Squashing ANTs--Part 1	Pg. 10
Squashing ANTs--Part 2	Pg. 11
Squashing ANTs Activity	Pg. 12
Red Light, Green Light	Pg. 13
Red Light, Green Light Matching Game	Pg. 14
Red Light, Green Light--Write or Draw	Pg. 15
Facing Fears--Part 1	Pg. 16
Facing Fears--Part 2	Pg. 17
It's a Miracle!	Pg. 18
It's a Miracle!--Part 2	Pg. 19
My Hero	Pg. 20
That's a Wrap!	Pg. 21

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. Draw or write some other feelings that you know.

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 anxiety is a feeling, but it’s also your body’s reaction to danger. There’s one more part to anxiety--thoughts (also called the “mind”). 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, hopeless 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've 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 your friend dares you to ride on the hood of their car (your body, mind and emotions know this is not a good idea!), 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 for Teens 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. Include as many details as you can.

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

You Are Not Anxiety

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

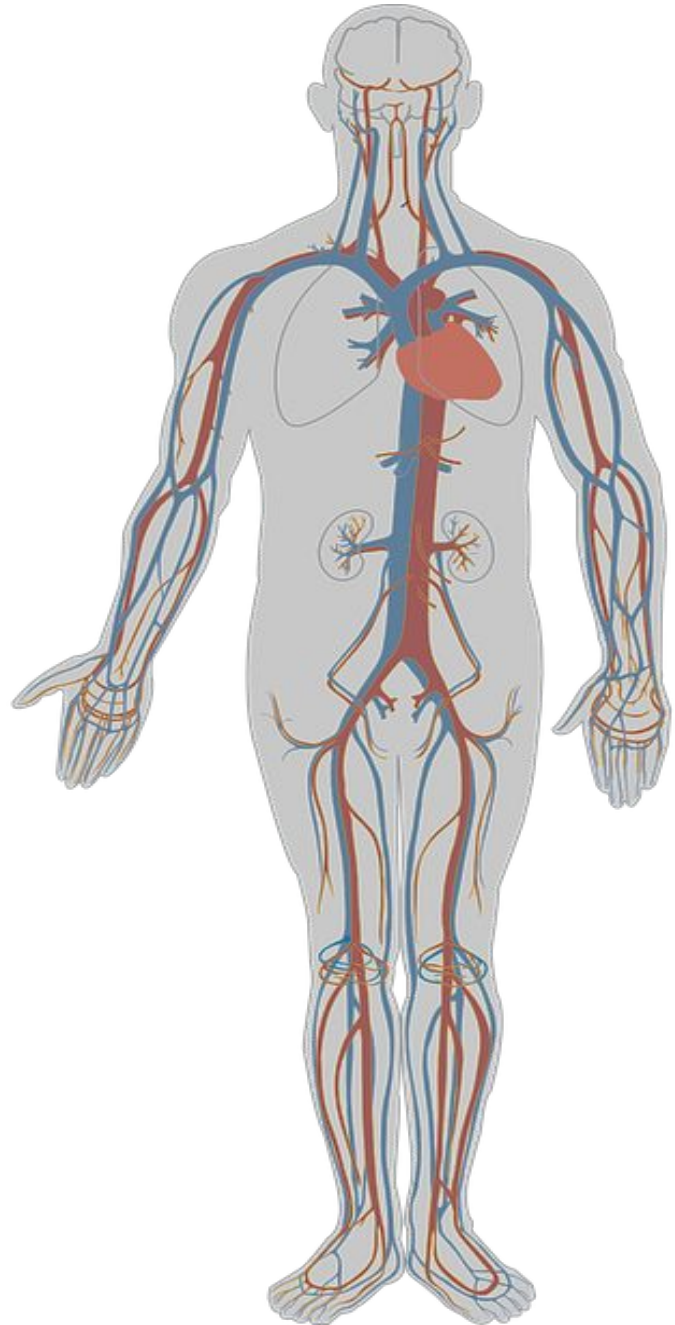
Fight or Flight

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 OR 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, emotions you experience, 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:					
Emotions I felt:					
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 doesn't act alone. The rest & digest system also comes into play. This system puts the brakes on, and tries to get your body, mind and emotions to calm down. When your rest & digest system is working well, 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 also means your immune system is working (you fight off disease and germs pretty well). Your digestion works too, which is getting nutrients from the food you eat into the bones, muscles, tissues and glands that need it. (Can I just say right here that a healthy diet is SO important to good health--physical and mental!)

That all sounds great, doesn't it? But a lot of people say that anxiety is so loud and obnoxious that it's hard to get it to shut up so the rest & digest system can work.

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. Feel the tightness in your abdomen and back. Hold just a bit longer. Now release the air, real slowly. When your belly is completely empty, pause for a few seconds. Ok, do it again. Fill your belly, hold it hold it, release it slowly. Pause again. The more often you practice this the quicker you will be able to get your body to relax. Don't go too fast!

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:

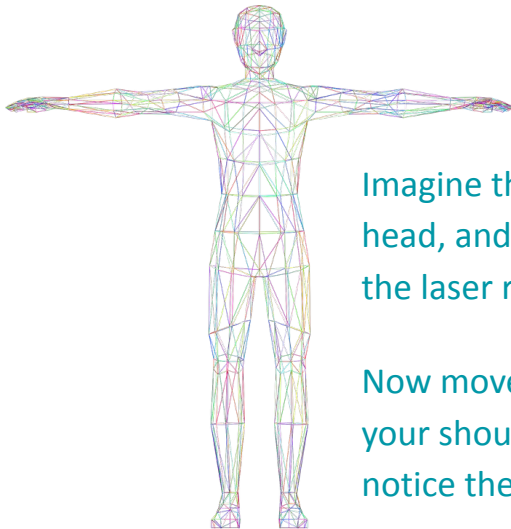
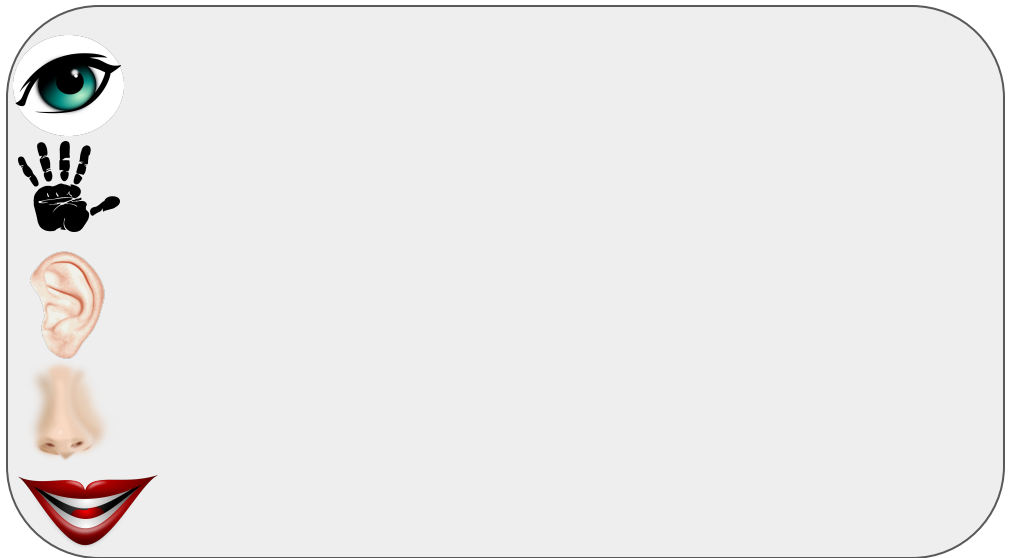
5 things you can see.

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.
I'm talking about

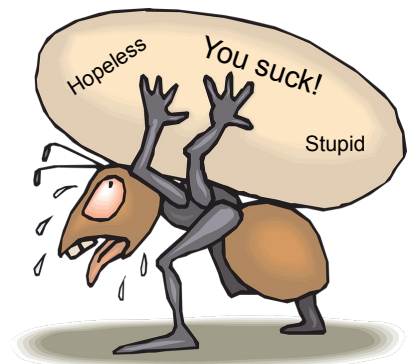
Automatic
Negative
Thoughts



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 cool in nature, but ANTs are not fun when they're 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 which 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 or fat.
- ☐ 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/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 will judge 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 partner might 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 you need to squash that ANT by coming up with a new thought that is more true, and more helpful. Here's an example of how this works:

ANT	Is it 100% true?	Is it helpful?	New true/helpful thought
"I can't go on the rollercoaster! What if I puke and everyone is disgusted? That would be humiliating and I would die!"	<p>I'm not 100% sure that I would puke--maybe I won't.</p> <p>It's not 100% true that everyone would be disgusted--maybe some people would laugh.</p> <p>I may feel humiliated, but no one has ever died from that.</p>	The thought "I could puke" is causing anxiety that makes me avoid the rollercoaster. Maybe this will help me avoid being humiliated, but staying home by myself isn't much fun. This thought is a little helpful, but I also feel like I am missing out.	I probably won't puke on the rollercoaster, but if I do some people may be disgusted, but probably not everyone. I remember when someone else puked, and it was really gross, but I still like that person so I'm sure people will still like me. I'm going on the rollercoaster!



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 intensely 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 sleeping alone in the middle of the woods.

It's important to recognize how intense the anxiety is, so that we know when we can challenge ourselves to push through uncomfortable feelings of anxiety (which is the healthy thing to do), versus becoming overwhelmed by anxiety so that our brain shuts down from fight or flight 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 your fight or flight system is running the show and you are losing control. All you can think about is starting a fight or running away.



The yellow light is **CHALLENGING**. This means you are not comfortable in the situation, but you can use the skills you learned previously to flip on your rest & digest system, and squash ANTs. You are in control--not your anxiety.



The green light is **EASY**. Maybe you feel a little bit of anxiety, but you got this.



Red Light, Green Light Matching Game

For each item below, indicate how intense you think your anxiety would be in each situation.

- ★ Seeing a spider.
- ★ Walking in the dark alone.
- ★ Petting a dog.
- ★ Taking a test.
- ★ Being at a party and not knowing anyone.
- ★ Being home alone.
- ★ Giving a speech in front of your class.
- ★ You feel sick.
- ★ It's time to go to school.
- ★ Something feels stuck in your throat.
- ★ Your friend won't talk to you.
- ★ It's time for bed.
- ★ 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 anxiety may feel to you in different situations. Now it's time to take your 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 climbing a mountain. You 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 since you've had some practice in those tricky places. Your climbing skills are improving. When you get too tired you stop and rest for awhile. When you get strength back you keep going--higher and higher and higher. Almost there. Just a little bit more. You can't quit now. YOU MADE IT! That was a difficult journey! How do you feel?



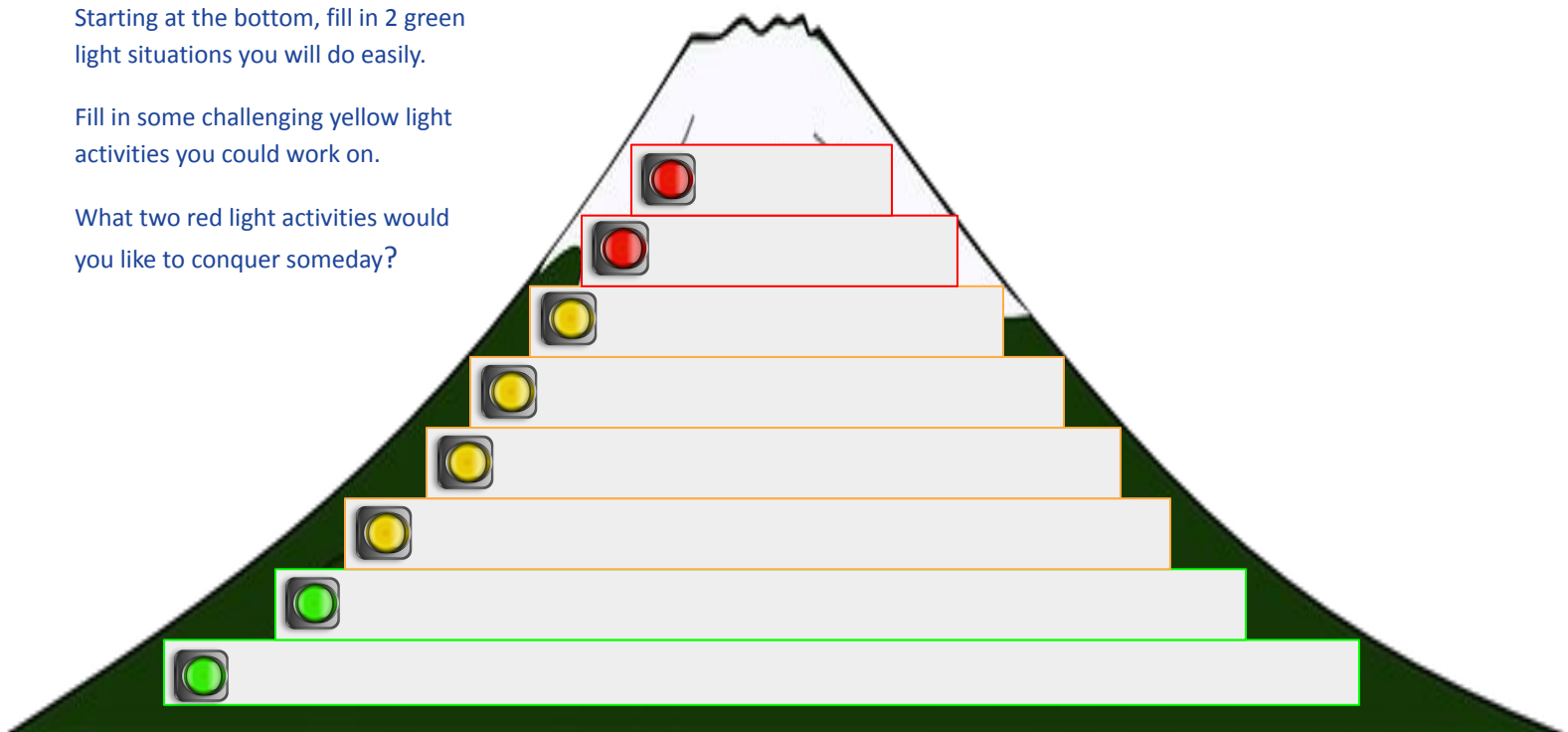
Draw yourself climbing the mountain

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 you will do easily.

Fill in some challenging yellow light activities you could work on.

What two red light activities would you 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. The same is true for conquering anxiety. Challenge yourself, but avoid becoming overwhelmed.
- ↑ **Decide where and how long you will practice the activity.** Once you meet that goal, can you increase the challenge?
- ↑ **Celebrate each milestone.** This is hard work. You're doing it!
- ↑ **Don't give up!** You can take breaks and rest for a 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!

This book gave you 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 have learned 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 living the life you want. Even though you've already learned a lot about anxiety, there are still a few more things you can do.

Did 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. Kids are great at this, but as we age many people find it gets harder and harder to activate that old rusty thing. This is an opportunity for you to be a kid at heart, so give it a try.

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:

My pants ripped in class, but...

IT'S A MIRACLE!

Everyone thought it was the new style and 3 other kids did it too.

Finish the miracles below. Draw or write your answers.

I started choking on my pizza, but

IT'S A MIRACLE!

I failed the exam, 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!

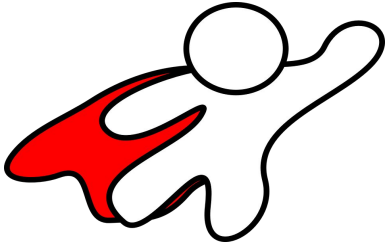


Bad Situation:

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 or noble qualities? If you've been working on conquering your anxiety then rest assured 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:

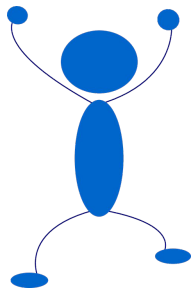
Super abilities (what your hero can do):

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

--	--	--	--

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!