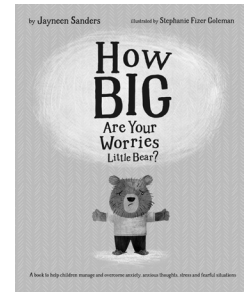


# 3 Lessons in Helping Children with Anxiety



**FOCUS TEXT:** *How Big Are Your Worries Little Bear?* (ages 3–9 years)

Depending on the age of the children, the following lessons will take place over three sessions. Please adapt the lessons to suit the needs and ages of the children.

## KEY OBJECTIVES

### Children will understand that:

- everyone has things that they worry about
- we can learn ways to reduce our worries
- staying calm allows us to better deal with fearful situations.

### In these lessons children will:

- take part in various relaxation activities to provide them with a toolbox of techniques which they can draw upon to 'refocus' when feeling anxious
- create a representation of their 'safe place'

- think about their worries and how they can overcome them.

### For the lessons you will need:

- *How Big Are Your Worries Little Bear?* (book)
- large sheets of poster/butcher's paper
- whiteboard, markers
- coloured pencils, textas
- A4 paper
- resource masters: 'What Are Your Worries?' and 'Overcoming a Worry'

## Lesson 1: What's a Worry?

### Relaxation Activity: Guided Meditation

Have students find their own space on the floor, and lie down with their eyes closed. In a calm voice, slowly read the following script to them:

'Keep your eyes closed and listen to your breathing; slowly breath in and out, feeling your chest rise and fall, rise and fall. I want you to feel your body relax. Imagine that you are lying on the softest blanket; your body feels heavy and sleepy. You feel your arms and legs relax into the blanket, then your back, and your shoulders and your head. Listen to your breathing again; in and out, in and out. You are on your blanket in the middle of a room. In one corner of the room is something that makes you feel happy. It may be a person or an animal or an object. When you see it, it makes you feel warm inside and you smile [pause]. In another corner is something that makes you feel proud. It represents something that you are good at; something that you can do well. When you see it, you feel proud of yourself [pause]. In another corner is something that makes you feel worried or scared; something

that you may have trouble doing or something that frightens you. You may feel your heart starting to beat faster. It makes you feel uneasy and worried [pause]. And in the last corner, there is a big glass door and through the door you can see a beautiful, green, grassy hill. The hill is covered in flowers in all of your favourite colours. You walk out of the door and smell the grass and the flowers. You breathe in deeply and out slowly. You lie on the grass and relax. You are calm [pause]. You begin to feel your toes and your fingers, and you give them a little wriggle. Then you can feel your arms, legs and shoulders. When you are ready, you can open your eyes and take a few deep breaths in and out, and then slowly sit up.'

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## Whole Class Discussion: Sharing Our 'Worries' and Visualising a Safe Place

*You will need: poster paper (or butcher's paper), markers*

Have students volunteer to share what they imagined when in the guided meditation session, focussing mainly on what makes them feel worried or scared.

**Note:** some students may not feel comfortable sharing; instead they may share what made them feel happy or choose to sit and listen to others.

As students provide examples of things that make them feel worried, create a brainstorm diagram of 'worries' on a large sheet of poster paper. If/when a child provides a scenario that is a common childhood fear such as being afraid of the dark, monsters under the bed, going to the dentist, meeting new people, going down a steep slide, etc. ask the group, 'Has anyone else ever felt frightened or worried about that?' The aim is to create the collective group idea that everyone worries sometimes, and we are not alone in what we worry about. Have students think back to the meditation activity; to when they stepped outside onto the grassy hill and lay down on the grass amongst the flowers. Ask, 'How did it make you feel?' Discuss.

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## Independent Task: Drawing a Safe Place

*You will need: A4 paper, coloured pencils*

Have students draw the 'safe place' they visualised in the meditation; a place where they feel calm. Have them think about the colours they visualised to make themselves feel calm and encourage their use in their drawing.

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## Reflection

Have students sit in a circle and hold their work up for the class to see. If time allows, select students to share their work with the class. These drawings may be kept by the students to refer to when needed, or display them in the classroom as a 'calm corner' or 'safe place'.

# Lesson 2: How Big Are Your Worries?

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## Relaxation Activity: Controlled Breathing

Have children imagine they are holding a hot chocolate. Have them take in a long, slow breath through their nose and count silently to five; to smell the delicious hot chocolate. Now say, 'But it is too hot to drink, so breathe out 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and blow on the drink to cool it down.' Repeat until they have completed at least six slow breaths.

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## Whole Class Activity: In-depth Reading

*You will need: How Big Are Your Worries Little Bear? by Jayneen Sanders*

Read *How Big Are Your Worries Little Bear* to the class. Discuss as appropriate. Suggested discussion questions are located on pp.34–35.

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## Independent Task: What Are Your Worries?

*You will need: resource master 'What Are Your Worries?' and the 'worries brainstorm poster' from Lesson 1*

Have students complete resource master 'What Are Your Worries?' allowing them time to think about the kinds of things Little Bear worried about, and the things that they personally worry about. Have the 'worries brainstorm poster' from Lesson 1 on display to prompt ideas regarding personal worries. If students become distressed during this activity, refer them back to their drawing of their 'safe place'. Have them imagine themselves sitting in their safe place, while practising their controlled breathing.

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## Reflection

Have students volunteer to share their work, briefly discussing the things they are worried about. Some students may wish for their worries to remain private. Remind the class that they are welcome to come and talk to you (or another adult they trust) about anything they are worried about; just as Little Bear spoke to his mother about his worries.

# Lesson 3: Overcoming Your Worries

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## Relaxation Activity: Using All Five Senses

Have students sit on the floor and whisper to themselves five things they can see. Then have them close their eyes and listen. Now have them whisper four things they can *hear*. Next, three things they can *feel*, for example, the socks on their feet, the carpet under their legs, etc. Then two things they can *smell*; and finally one thing they can or would like to *taste*.

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## Whole Class Discussion: How Worries Make Us Feel and Reducing Our Worries

*You will need: whiteboard, whiteboard markers*

Have students think about what happens to their body when they are worried or scared. List these feelings/reactions on the whiteboard, examples may include: shaking or trembling, heart beating faster, sweating/sweaty hands, difficulty in talking, feeling sick in stomach, feeling light headed/faint, shortness of breath, lump in the throat, weak legs, etc. Encourage students to provide their own examples. Prompt them with ideas if necessary. If providing a suggestion, ask 'Does anyone feel \_\_\_\_ when they are worried?' and discuss.

Next, ask students, 'In the book, how did Little Bear make his worries smaller?' Discuss the strategies used by Little Bear and write these on the whiteboard, i.e. sharing your worries with someone you trust, drawing or writing about your worries and measuring your worries with your arms to indicate how big they are. Ask, 'Do you have any other ways to make your worries smaller?' and add their ideas to the list of strategies on the whiteboard; examples may include: staying calm (by imagining your 'safe place'), controlled breathing, using your senses, visualising yourself overcoming the fear and being brave, asking for help from your friends, telling yourself it'll be okay/that you can do it (positive self-talk).

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## Independent Task: Overcoming a Worry

Have students complete resource master 'Overcoming a Worry' for one of their worries they wrote about on resource master 'What Are Your Worries?' in Lesson 2. Students can write and/or draw their responses.

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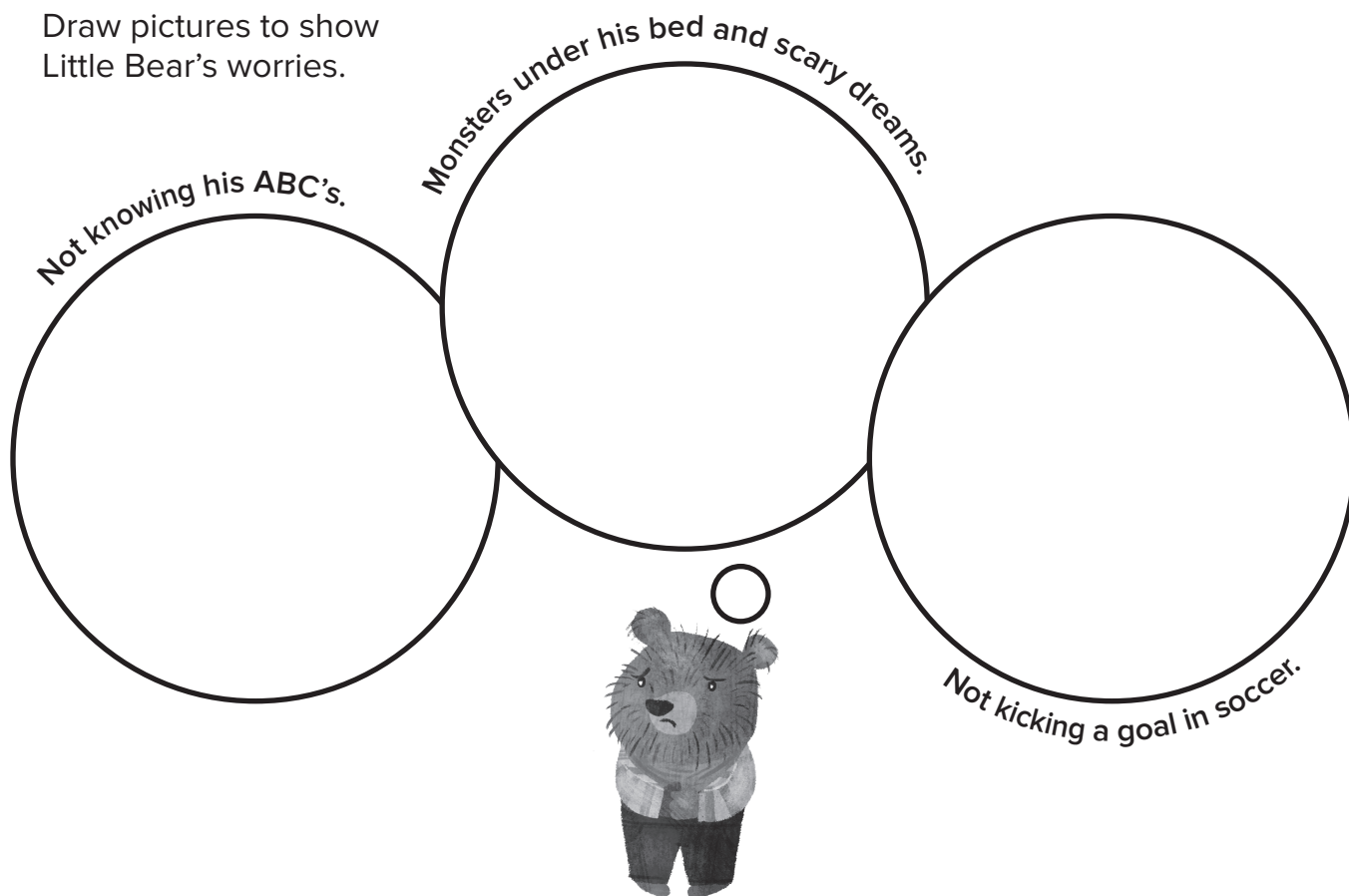
## Reflection

Have students share their work with a partner; talking about their worry and how they are going to try to overcome it. Encourage them to talk to their caregivers or another trusted adult about their worries and about the things they can do to make their worries smaller.

*Teaching notes written by Yale Mercieca*

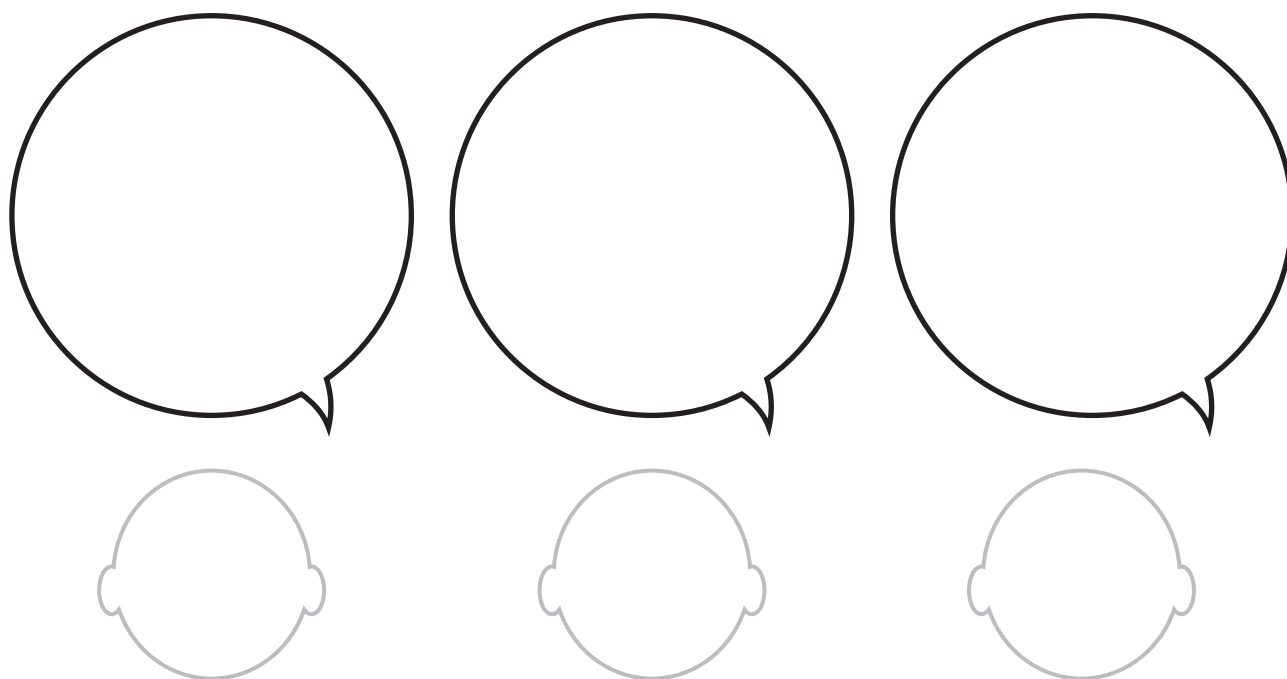
# What Are Your Worries?

Draw pictures to show  
Little Bear's worries.



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Draw yourself on the face outlines.  
Draw or write down some things that you worry about.



# Overcoming a Worry

Sometimes I worry about ...

When I'm worried, my body sometimes feels ...

To overcome my worry, I am going to try to ...

Something that makes me feel calm is ...