

NAME & TAME

Your

ANXIETY

A Kid's Guide



© 2021 Free Spirit Publishing Inc. All rights reserved.

free spirit  
PUBLISHING®

SUMMER BATTE

NAME & TAME  
Your  
Anxiety

A Kid's Guide

Summer Batte  
Illustrated by Amberin Huq

free spirit  
PUBLISHING®



Text copyright © 2021 by Summer Batte

Illustrations copyright © 2021 by Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Unless otherwise noted, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations or critical reviews. For more information, go to [freespirit.com/permissions](https://freespirit.com/permissions).

Free Spirit, Free Spirit Publishing, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Free Spirit Publishing Inc. A complete listing of our logos and trademarks is available at [freespirit.com](https://freespirit.com).

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Batte, Summer, author. | Huq, Amberin, illustrator.

Title: Name and tame your anxiety : a kid's guide / Summer Batte ; illustrated by Amberin Huq.

Description: Minneapolis : Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Audience: Ages 9–13

Identifiers: LCCN 2020041309 (print) | LCCN 2020041310 (ebook) | ISBN 9781631986208 (paperback) | ISBN 9781631986215 (pdf) | ISBN 9781631986222 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Anxiety—Juvenile literature. | Anxiety in children—Juvenile literature. | Anxiety disorders—Juvenile literature.

Classification: LCC BF575.A6 B38 2021 (print) | LCC BF575.A6 (ebook) | DDC 155.4/1246—dc23  
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020041309>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020041310>

Free Spirit Publishing does not have control over or assume responsibility for author or third-party websites and their content. At the time of this book's publication, all facts and figures cited within are the most current available. All telephone numbers, addresses, and website URLs are accurate and active; all publications, organizations, websites, and other resources exist as described in this book; and all have been verified as of August 2020. If you find an error or believe that a resource listed here is not as described, please contact Free Spirit Publishing. Parents, teachers, and other adults: We strongly urge you to monitor children's use of the internet.

Reading Level Grade 6; Interest Level Ages 9–13;  
Fountas & Pinnell Guided Reading Level W

Edited by Cassie Sitzman

Cover and interior design by Emily Dyer

Illustrated by Amberin Huq

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

C12200221

#### **Free Spirit Publishing Inc.**

6325 Sandburg Road, Suite 100

Minneapolis, MN 55427-3674

(612) 338-2068

[help4kids@freespirit.com](mailto:help4kids@freespirit.com)

[freespirit.com](https://freespirit.com)

#### **Free Spirit offers competitive pricing.**

Contact [edsales@freespirit.com](mailto:edsales@freespirit.com) for pricing information on multiple quantity purchases.

## Dedication

For my daughter, who inspired me; my husband, who calmly supports everything I get myself into; my family, who are the best cheerleaders; and all the friends who asked for years when I was going to write a book. You can stop now.

## Acknowledgments

For 13 years, doctors, psychologists, therapists, teachers, and friends have made time for conversations with me as I figured out how to parent, and then educate, a child with anxiety. Every one of those conversations helped in the creation of this book, as have the dozens of books on anxiety that sit on my shelves. My thanks to Cassandra Sitzman and Free Spirit Publishing for taking on this project and guiding me through the process; to psychologist Dr. Myles Cooley for his review of the book; to family, friends, and colleagues who listened to my half-baked ideas, talked to me about their own children's struggles, read drafts of this book, or offered their advice and perspectives; and to Stanford University, my alma mater and my employer, where I learned the basics of psychology, gained the confidence to take on any subject, and developed the skills to turn what I've learned into something that can help others.

# Contents

A Note to Kids..... 1

## **PART 1** Understanding Anxiety

**Chapter 1 What Is Anxiety?**..... 6

    How Anxiety Feels..... 7

    Can Other People Tell That You  
        Are Feeling Anxiety?..... 10

    Words That Mean Anxiety..... 12

    When Anxiety Starts to Get in the Way ..... 13

    What Anxiety Is and Is Not..... 16

**Chapter 2 What Causes Anxiety** ..... 18

    When People Feel Anxiety ..... 21

    Heredity..... 22

    When Anxiety Is Good ..... 24

    When Anxiety Is a Problem ..... 24

    What’s Happening in Your Brain ..... 26

    How the Parts of the Brain Work Together ..... 28

**Chapter 3 Types of Anxiety** ..... 33

    Common Types of Anxiety ..... 34

## **PART 2** Taming Anxiety

### **Chapter 4** How to Stop Anxiety from Being in Charge ..... 42

How a Little Healthy Fear Can Turn into a Big Anxiety .....	43
Times Anxiety Likes to Take Control.....	45
Benefits of Learning to Manage Anxiety.....	47
Keeping Your Brain and Body Healthy .....	48
What You Can Do When You Feel Anxiety .....	60
How to Plan for Anxiety.....	66

### **Chapter 5** Therapy ..... 70

Who Are Therapists? .....	71
What Happens in the Therapist’s Office?.....	73
What Happens in Therapy? .....	77
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) .....	79
How Long Will I Go to Therapy? .....	80

### **Chapter 6** How Anxiety Works in Your Brain (and How Medication Can Help) ..... 82

How Brain Messages Get Delivered .....	83
How to Make Serotonin .....	84
Medication for Anxiety .....	86
How SSRIs Work.....	87
What Happens When You Take an SSRI .....	89
What Does NOT Happen When You Take an SSRI.....	90
What It Feels Like to Take Anxiety Medication.....	91
Side Effects of Anxiety Medications.....	92
How Long to Take Anxiety Medication.....	92

## Part 3 Talking About Anxiety

<b>Chapter 7 Self-Advocacy</b> .....	96
When to Self-Advocate .....	98
How to Self-Advocate .....	100
Who (and How Much) to Tell About Your Anxiety ....	106
Translating Things Grown-Ups Say.....	108
When to Listen to Your Gut (Even If You've Been Told Your Gut Overreacts).....	112
<b>Chapter 8 Before You Go</b> .....	116
Conditions That Often Coexist with Anxiety .....	116
What It Feels Like to Be Less Worried .....	118
Describing Yourself .....	119
The End .....	120
<b>A Note to Adults</b> .....	121
<b>Glossary</b> .....	123
<b>Resources</b> .....	126
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	130
<b>Index</b> .....	134
<b>About the Author</b> .....	137

# A Note to Kids

Have you ever felt worried about something that hasn't happened yet—like a big test or your first meeting at a new club? That's anxiety! Have you ever felt uneasy or nervous about a story you've heard on the news? That's anxiety too! Maybe the feeling goes away after a little while, or maybe you have those feelings almost all the time. Everyone—kids and grown-ups—feels anxiety sometimes. But adults don't always explain anxiety or how to manage it in a way that makes sense to kids. It's important for kids to understand the science behind anxiety and know why learning to manage it can help them.



In this book, you'll learn more about anxiety and how it works in your brain and body, what you can do to feel less anxiety right now and in the future, and why some kids get help for anxiety (and what happens if you do). You'll also learn about self-advocacy, or speaking up for what you need, and how to understand and respond to some of the common things adults say about anxiety.

I recommend reading this book from beginning to end. That way you'll understand the basics of anxiety and how it works in your brain and body, and the rest of the book will make more sense. But you can also skip around to find the parts that are most helpful or interesting to you. However you choose to read this book, there are a few things to know:



- This book sometimes uses the word *parent* to mean a *trusted adult*. That could be your mom, dad, grandparent, aunt or uncle, favorite teacher, school counselor, religious or spiritual leader, stepparent, foster parent, or whoever your most trusted adults are.
- In this book, *anxiety* is most often used as a noun (rather than the adjective *anxious*). It can be helpful to think of anxiety as a *thing* we deal with rather than a part of us we can't control.
- This book uses the names of real brain parts and chemicals so you can start to understand what happens in your brain when you feel anxiety. There are more parts of the brain and chemicals involved in anxiety than we can cover in this book. This is a beginning to help you learn about the basics.
- This book explains what it means to have an anxiety disorder, what happens in therapy, and how medications for anxiety work. This doesn't mean you have to have an anxiety disorder to read the book. The strategies and information are helpful for all people who have anxiety.
- This book includes examples of things kids your age might be worried about. You may recognize some of them, and others might not worry you at all. Some may be things you were not worried about before, but now start to worry you. If these new ideas worry you, know that it's also okay to talk back to anxiety and decide to pay attention to other things instead. This book will show you how.

- As you work on managing anxiety, you'll get better at telling your brain that it's okay to calm down or think about something else. The more you practice the skills and strategies in this book, the easier they will get.
- Kids who feel a lot of anxiety are very brave—after all, you might be facing your fears every single day!
- You are ready to learn about anxiety and understand the things grown-ups are saying about it.



I hope this book helps you understand what is happening in your own body and brain when you feel anxiety. And I hope it gives you a starting point for talking with the adults who can help you get what you need to start managing anxiety.

I'd love to know what you thought was helpful in this book. Write to me to tell me what you liked or let me know about other anxiety-taming strategies you like to use.

## Summer Batte

You can email me at [help4kids@freespirit.com](mailto:help4kids@freespirit.com).

Or you can send me a letter in care of:

Free Spirit Publishing

6325 Sandburg Road, Suite 100

Minneapolis, MN 55427-3674

# PART 1

## Understanding Anxiety



# What Is Anxiety?



**Anxiety** is your body's natural response to stress. It is a feeling of worry. You may feel a little bit of anxiety or a lot of it. It can alert you to danger and can help you prepare and pay attention. Like happiness, sadness, and other feelings, anxiety is part of being human. Everyone feels it sometimes. Those feelings start in our brains. But our brains and our bodies are connected. Sometimes we can determine what's happening in our brains by how our bodies react. Have you ever smiled and taken a big breath when you saw someone you love? Have you ever had a stomachache before the first

day of school? Maybe you've cried when you lost something important to you or felt your heart beat fast during the scary part of a movie.



## Anxiety:

A feeling of worry about something that could happen, something you imagine might happen, or something that happened in the past.

Those things happen in your body, but they are all reactions to feelings in your brain—happiness, sadness, and fear. When you feel anxiety, your brain can show you that feeling of worry through reactions in your body.

## How Anxiety Feels

Anxiety feels different to each person, but for most people, it causes a reaction in their body that can feel pretty uncomfortable. When we talk about body reactions that we might wish to have less often, we call them **symptoms**.



## Symptom:

A sign or signal about what's going on in a person's brain or body.

A runny nose can be a symptom of a cold. You can't really see the cold, but you can tell your friend probably has one if his nose is runny. And your friend would probably like to have the cold and the runny-nose symptom go away. A sore

throat is another common symptom of a cold. You can't really see your friend's sore throat, but he can feel it, and that's how he might know he is sick.

Symptoms of anxiety are similar—they are the ways we can tell that a brain is probably worried. Most people would like to feel anxiety less often, so we call the body reactions to anxiety “symptoms of anxiety.”

Here's what some kids say anxiety feels like:

My stomach hurts.

I don't want to go to school because I feel like everyone else is an alien. They are smiling while I feel worried about everything.

It's hard to pay attention to a conversation. I miss a lot of what people say, and then I feel confused and even more anxious.

My brain keeps saying the same things over and over. I can't make it stop and it makes it hard to fall asleep.

It feels like at any moment something bad might happen. I'm waiting for it to happen, but it doesn't.



We can't see anxiety because it's a feeling, not a physical thing. You *can* see a cold, technically, because it's a virus. But you'd need a great microscope, so most of us rely on knowing the symptoms. Most anxiety symptoms cannot be seen by others. A racing heart or headache is probably not visible to friends. But the person experiencing these symptoms can feel them.

## Anxiety Symptoms

There are lots of possible symptoms of anxiety. Here are some of them:

- upset stomach
- headache
- trouble sleeping
- biting nails
- trouble focusing or paying attention
- not wanting to go to school
- crying more than usual
- getting angry at people you care about (not just your brother!)
- sweaty hands
- racing heart
- fear of leaving your parent
- fast breathing or a feeling like you can't get enough air
- confusion
- trouble sitting still
- keep thinking about bad things that could happen





- checking things over and over to make sure they are right
- trouble speaking when a teacher calls on you
- just don't feel right

You may have felt one of these symptoms of anxiety or many of them, or you may have had different symptoms. You might wonder how we know that these are signs of anxiety. Sometimes, it can be hard to know. But if you pay attention to the times you feel these symptoms, you can start to notice patterns. For example, if you get a stomachache before one swim lesson, it's probably just a stomachache. (Stomachs can be weird like that.) But if you get a stomachache before *every* swim lesson—it's happening over and over—then it's probably anxiety.

It can help to talk about your symptoms with a trusted adult (such as a parent or stepparent, a teacher or school counselor, or a coach). This person can help you decide whether a feeling is a symptom of anxiety or something else. In chapter 4, you'll learn ways to help yourself with those feelings and symptoms too.

## Can Other People Tell That You Are Feeling Anxiety?

Some symptoms of anxiety—such as biting your nails—might be visible. Other symptoms—such as a pounding heart—are only felt by the person experiencing them. Often, other people can't tell that you are feeling anxiety. And you probably can't tell that they are feeling anxiety either. If it's the first day of the new school year and you feel very worried about being with a new teacher and new classmates, you

might look around to see if other kids are feeling the same way. You might decide that nobody else is feeling anxiety or having worries because they are not showing symptoms that you can see. But here's a secret: *lots of them are worried!* (It's common to feel anxiety in new situations or when you try new things.) You just might not be able to see the symptoms of anxiety that the other kids are experiencing. They may also be using some handy tricks to calm themselves down and to remind themselves that they are safe. You can learn those things too. We call them **strategies**, and you can read more about them on pages 60-66.



## Strategy:

Something you can do to help your brain know that everything is okay and it can calm down now.



# Words That Mean Anxiety

Everyone feels anxiety. But we don't often hear it called *anxiety*. If you listen, you might hear people say. . .

- . . . I'm **nervous** about a test.
- . . . I feel **scared** to go somewhere new.
- . . . I'm **worried** about giving a speech.
- . . . I feel **overwhelmed** or **stressed** about how much work I have to do.
- . . . I **can't** do this.

You may have felt these things too. Maybe you feel . . .

- . . . **nervous** about playing well in the big game.
- . . . **scared** about something happening to your family.
- . . . **worried** that your classmates are still thinking about a mistake you made.
- . . . **overwhelmed** or **stressed** about remembering your lines in the school play.
- . . . like you **just can't** go to school again.

These are all examples of anxiety. And these words are ways of saying "I'm feeling anxiety." It happens to everybody. And with good reason. Anxiety is your brain's way of telling you to be careful. But sometimes our brains overreact, misunderstand, or can't calm down, making us feel anxiety longer, more intensely, or more often than we need to.

# When Anxiety Starts to Get in the Way

Everyone has feelings of anxiety sometimes, but some people have feelings of anxiety much more often than others do, and their feelings—or symptoms—are more **intense**. If anxiety starts to make it difficult for you to do the things you want to do (such as hang out at your friend’s house) or need to do (such as go to school), your parents may take you to the doctor. It could be the doctor you are used to seeing for your check-ups, or it could be someone new. If anxiety is getting in the way at school, a teacher may suggest that you talk with a school counselor or school psychologist.



## Intense:

A word commonly used when talking about symptoms. It means the strength of the symptom. We can use intensity to describe other things too. The sound of a mother singing to her baby is quiet, not a very intense sound. But the sound of a lawnmower near you is very intense!

The doctor will ask questions about your symptoms and their intensity. She may ask how you feel about school, what you like to do with friends, and what you and your family like to do at home. You can be totally honest during this conversation. Sometimes kids think they should answer that they like school (or raising their hand in class or going to birthday parties) because grown-ups want them to like these things. But adults need to hear how you really feel so they can help with your anxiety. Grown-ups are generally pretty sturdy—they can handle it!

*The doctor asked how I feel when I get to school.  
I don't know what the feeling is. I just don't like it.*

It can be difficult to explain the feelings in your brain. Instead, try to describe what happens in your body. Maybe your muscles feel tight or it becomes hard to hear what people are saying to you. Maybe you start to feel hot or sick, or you get tired and want to cover your head.



The doctor may also do a few things you are used to, like looking in your ears and listening to your heart. She may have you take a blood test (which may sound scary but is very quick and very safe). She is doing these tests to rule out any physical problems that may be causing your symptoms.

After talking to you and reviewing the tests, your doctor may give you a **diagnosis**. You may be diagnosed with an anxiety **disorder**. You can ask the doctor to explain what your anxiety disorder means and whether other kids have it. (They do. In fact, 4.4 million kids in the United States have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. That's a lot of kids!) The doctor may recommend you see a counselor, therapist, or another doctor. She will also talk with you and your parents about **treatment**.



## Diagnosis:

An official name for the cause of your symptoms, given by an expert.

## Disorder:

A word to mean that something is not working the way we would hope. Sort of the opposite of order. But not like ordering a burrito. You can't dis-order a burrito. Besides, why would you want to?

## Treatment:

Working with a doctor, counselor, or therapist on learning to manage anxiety or another challenge.

## REAL QUESTIONS FROM REAL KIDS

### **“What if I don’t have an anxiety disorder?”**

Not everyone has an anxiety disorder, even if they are having trouble managing anxiety. If your doctor doesn’t diagnose you with an anxiety disorder, she will probably make some suggestions about how you and your family can work on managing anxiety.



Whether or not you have an anxiety disorder, you might wonder if you’ll always struggle with anxiety. Each person is different, but when anxiety starts to get in the way, it doesn’t usually just go away on its own. However, you can learn to manage your anxiety more often. Many people who learn to manage their anxiety feel pretty great most of the time.

## What Anxiety Is and Is Not

- Anxiety is not a sign that you are broken.
- Anxiety is something every person feels from time to time. Some people have an anxiety disorder.
- Anxiety is not something we want to go away completely. A little bit of anxiety can help you do your best on a test or before a performance and can keep you safe.
- Anxiety is exhausting to feel too much of. Learning how to manage it can make you feel a lot better.
- Anxiety is not a sign that you are not smart. People of all intelligence levels have anxiety.

- Anxiety is not contagious like a cold. You can't catch it by being around another person with anxiety.
- Anxiety is something that can be passed down through families. If you have anxiety, there's a good chance someone else in your family also does.
- Anxiety is not your fault. Getting help with anxiety is a positive and brave thing to do.