

MY ANXIOUS MIND



A TEEN'S GUIDE to MANAGING ANXIETY and PANIC

by MICHAEL A. TOMPKINS, PhD and KATHERINE MARTINEZ, PsyD

Illustrated by MICHAEL SLOAN

CONTENTS

<i>Note to Reader</i>	ix
<i>Chapter 1</i> When Anxiety Is a Problem	3
<i>Chapter 2</i> Who and How to Ask for Help	19
<i>Chapter 3</i> Breathing and Relaxing	35
<i>Chapter 4</i> Thinking Smart	49
<i>Chapter 5</i> Facing Fears One Step at a Time	71
<i>Chapter 6</i> Floating With Panic Attacks	95
<i>Chapter 7</i> Family, Friend, and School Stress	115
<i>Chapter 8</i> Nutrition, Exercise, and Sleep	129
<i>Chapter 9</i> Straight Talk About Medication	149
<i>Chapter 10</i> Hope, Heart, and Heads-Up	167

Contents

<i>Additional Resources</i>	181
<i>Bibliography</i>	191
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	193
<i>About the Authors</i>	195
<i>About the Illustrator</i>	196

NOTE TO READER

Think about how your life would be different if you were less anxious. What would change in your life? Would you try new activities or make new friends? Would you sleep better and have more free time because you study less?

Whether you are reading *My Anxious Mind* on your own, in a group, or with a parent, counselor, or psychotherapist, the tools and strategies described here may help you manage your worry and fear. We have helped many teens calm their anxious minds by creating individualized plans based on these tools. These tools are similar to those you might learn in cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT), a type of psychotherapy that teaches you to restore the ability of your mind and body to calm itself. We know CBT tools work, and we think they can work for you, too. We invite you to begin by completing the exercises and practicing the tools. You can work this practice into your daily routine. So, can you spare 30 minutes to feel less anxious?

Before you get started, we would like to offer some advice up front. We understand that no two teens are the same and that some things you read in this book may fit for you and other things may not. That is okay. We only ask that you use the tools and strategies that are helpful for your situation. And like so many things, success depends more on what you do than on what you want to do. Stay-

ing motivated to make a change will take some effort. Knowing that, we would like to encourage you to

- Take charge of your plan,
- Promise to keep going,
- Take small risks, and
- Admit the benefits of fear and worry and give them back!

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR PLAN

If your teachers did not load you with so much homework or if your friends or family didn't stress you out so much, would you be less anxious? Maybe, but you can control how much these things affect you. You are in charge of your anxious mind, not anyone else—not your parents, teachers, or friends. This may be tough for you to accept. However, taking charge is probably the most important and empowering step you can take. Taking charge means you do not blame your friends, your school, your parents, or yourself. Taking charge means taking back control. Taking charge also means leading the charge, not doing it all alone.

PROMISE TO KEEP GOING

Learning to calm your anxious mind will take time and practice. Even if you are very motivated to become less anxious, you will find that some days your anxiety is back. That is okay. On other days, you might not feel like doing anything. That is okay, too. It is hard to keep going after you have had a tough day and you wonder whether you will ever feel less anxious. But that cannot be a reason to stop practicing. Instead, try to promise yourself that you will work on your plan for at least three months and see what happens. And from time to time, take a look back. You will see that you are

ahead of where you began. You are getting there, and that is progress that will help you to keep going.

TAKE SMALL RISKS

To live your life fully is to take risks—small ones and big ones. As odd as it may sound, there is no way to calm your anxious mind without taking a chance, without risking to think and act a bit differently. If you have a phobia, that may mean facing your fear. If you have a panic attack, that might mean letting go rather than fighting against it. If your friends cause you stress, that may mean telling them how you feel. You won't need to take on all your fear at once, but if you tackle it in small steps, you can begin to break your fear and worries down, piece by piece, and learn to face them completely.

ADMIT THE BENEFITS OF FEAR AND WORRY AND GIVE THEM BACK

Have you ever told your parents that you were too stressed to do your homework or chores, when really you just did not want to do it right then? Many anxious teens have discovered some payoffs of staying anxious, but we know this does not mean you do not want to overcome your worry and fear. It just means that you have two minds when it comes to your anxiety and fear. There is your anxious mind, of course, but then, there is the other mind that is comfortable with the way things are. If you think you have some payoffs, we suggest you give them back, at least for a while, to see what you can accomplish. Otherwise, you may never know what you can do, what you can be, and how much you can succeed. We think you will see that it is totally worth it in the end.

At any time, if taking on your anxiety alone seems too tough, ask your parents or a close friend to coach you through the book.

Sometimes all it takes is a little reminder or a word of encouragement to get the ball rolling and keep it rolling. Coaches can gently nudge you toward trying hard things, while being patient and supportive along the way. It is not easy to overcome anxiety or phobias, and a good coach can really help.

However, sometimes the best coach may be a psychotherapist who has experience working with anxious teens. This is particularly true if you have extreme or intense anxiety. A professional can really help you move things along if you become stuck. If you are not in psychotherapy but would like to try it, speak to your parents. Later in this book, we will describe how you might go about asking for this kind of help if you want it.

Good luck!

Michael Tompkins and Katherine Martinez