

Anxiety and Worry – A select annotated bibliography

Anxiety in children is common. It's that feeling that something bad is going to happen, that you will fail and disappoint others and yourself. It may manifest itself in physical reactions such as 'butterflies in the stomach.'

It is quite natural to feel afraid or worried in new situations such as starting school, or fear of the dark or certain animals. In younger children it may be anxiety about separation from a parent. As children grow the type of worries can change. School age children may worry about making friends, criticism, tests or sadly bullying or physical harm. Social media also plays a significant role in stress and anxiety amongst older children.

The books listed here are not intended to be a basis for diagnosis rather they provide a picture of situations that children (and adults) can relate to and help to create an understanding of their feelings.

Expert help from a doctor, psychologist or counsellor should be sought for any ongoing concerns.

The list is divided into picture books, primary age chapter books, young adult books and non-fiction.

Picture Books

1. BALCKE, Tanya
I have a worry. Tanya Balcke, 2015. ISBN: 9780646942209
A picture story book that begins to share strategies of how children can begin to manage worries and anxiety.
2. BELL, Davina. Illustrated by Allison Colpoys.
The Underwater fancy-dress Parade. Scribe, 2015. ISBN: 9781925106206
The night before the underwater fancy-dress parade, Alfie got that feeling, sometimes it's hard to be brave. There's that feeling that you're just not ready, until one day you are. Sometimes it just takes time and understanding.
3. COATES, Lynelle and LOW, Kellie. Illustrated by Karen Laird
Sydney says Goodbye. A story about separation anxiety with support notes. Printed Leaf Publishing, 2011. ISBN: 97809808766819.
Sydney loves to go to Kindy-Care but today something doesn't feel right. He wants to play with his friends, but he also wants to stay with his dad. With help from his friends he is soon busy and enjoying the day.

4. CRABB, Jocelyn. Illustrated by Danny Snell
Ozzie goes to School. Working Title Press, 2019. ISBN: 9781921504907.
 Ozzie lives in the Top End in a shipping container by the sea. He isn't afraid of much, not the cool dark of the container at night, not snakes, not even the crocodiles that they need to watch out for on the beach. But there is something Ozzie is afraid of ...school.

5. DONALD, Trish
Tissywoo and the worry monsters. Little Pink Dog Books, 2018. ISBN: 9780994626943
 Tissywoo is about to start school. She is excited but also anxious... what will school be like, will her teacher be nice, will she make friends. She keeps on worrying and her worries turn into a little worry monster. As her anxiety grows so do the worry monsters till, they threaten to overwhelm her. Scared and frightened, she remembers something her mother taught her – a breathing technique. As she applies this the worry monsters slowly disappear.

6. ESTELA, Lucy. Illustrated by Elise Hurst
Girl on Wire. Puffin Books, 2018. ISBN: 9780143787167
 An uplifting allegory of a young girl struggling to build her self-esteem and overcome the anxiety many children feel as they grow – she walks the tightrope; afraid she will fall but with the support of her loved ones her feet grip the wire, and she moves forward with new confidence.
<https://www.ncacl.org.au/pbor-database/girl-on-wire/>

7. GRAHAM, Brooke. Illustrated by Robin Tatlow-Lord
Go Away, Worry Monster! EK Books, 2020. ISBN: 9781925820393
 Worry monster loves helping Archie worry especially the night before he starts his new school. Archie's head hurts, his tummy flutters and his heart pounds. He needs to make the worry monster go away. He remembers to do his special belly breaths and think of the facts that he knows about his new school and conquers the worry monster simply by ignoring him.
CBCA Shortlisted book

8. HUGHES, Jenny. Illustrated by Jonathan Bentley
A house of her own. Little Hare, 2014. ISBN: 9781742974620
 Audrey is bigger than she was yesterday. Now she needs a bigger house after inspecting various options Audrey decides she wants a house up high in the tree. Her dad sets about building one with all sorts of mod cons but as he finishes and starts to leave Audrey begins to have second thoughts even though she is definitely bigger than she was yesterday.
CBCA Shortlisted book

9. INNES, Shona. Illustrated by Írisz Agócs
Worries are like clouds. Little Hare, 2020. ISBN: 9781760505721
 Here worries are compared to the weather – some days are wonderful filled with sunshine that calls us outside to run and jump in the fresh air. Not all days are wonderful some are filled with troubles, gloom and worries. The book presents various strategies to help on those gloomy days when our anxiety and worries become a little too much.

10. JENKINS, Lynn. Illustrated by Kirrili Lonergan
Lessons of a LAC. EK Books, 2018. ISBN: 9781925335828.
Loppy is a LAC or 'Little Anxious Creature.' He always focuses on what could go wrong and can't stop worrying. Curly the Calmster is the opposite and tries to help Loppy by gently encouraging him to think differently about his worries. Along the way we learn simple and effective ways to reframe anxious thoughts and learn the right words to reassure themselves and others.
11. JENKINS, Lynn. Illustrated by Kirrili Lonergan
What if...? EK Books, 2021. ISBN: 9781925820973
Issy uses the words 'what if' a lot conjuring up all sorts of scary scenarios that make her anxious and worries. 'What if my floor turns to quicksand and swallows my bed,' 'what if an alien takes me in the middle of the night.' But with Mama's help she learns to flip her fears to fun using 'What if' in a different and more positive way.
12. LANGLEY, Josh
It's OK to feel the way you do otherwise you wouldn't be you! Big Sky Publishing, 2017. ISBN: 9781925520965.
Everyone has feelings , happy, sad, lonely, angry, anxious proud, scared – they are all feelings and emotions, and they are all OK! Every single one of them. Here children are helped to get to know and understand their feelings. It provides simple and effective ways for children to notice and manage difficult emotions like anger and anxiety and rejoice in the positive feelings like joy, empathy and happiness.
13. MORONEY, Trace
When I'm feeling nervous. Five Mile, 2020. ISBN: 9781925970500
Feeling nervous is uncomfortable. It can happen when you're confronted with a new or challenging situation. It can also mean that you are about to do something really brave. The book provides guidance in body language, situations that may induce nervousness and anxiety and provides simple strategies to cope.
14. PALMER, Rebecca J.
Monkey Mind. Little Pink Dog Books, 2020. ISBN: 978064826380
Piper wants to try lots of new things, but something always stops her – her monkey!
Everyone else can tame their monkey why can't she? A gentle story about the worrying thoughts that cause anxiety in children and adults. Anxiety in children is increasing at an exponential rate all over the world. Living with anxious thoughts is like having a monkey constantly chattering inside your head. In today's world children often believe mistakes lead to failure rather than learning and growth. It is important for them to know it is normal to feel anxious at times specially when faced with something new.

15. RUSSELL, Paul. Illustrated by Cara King
Courageous Lucy: the girl who liked to worry. EK Books, 2021. ISBN: 9781925820775
 Lucy is a worrier, she's so good at worrying that she worries about things that no one else even thinks of. She worried that her shadow might turn into a black hole and swallow her, or that she might meet the Queen on the way to school but forget her name. Lucy worried about everything, and she worried a lot. When her teacher announces that there is going to be a school musical Lucy wants to be part of it but is too worried to try out for any of the parts, but her teacher finds her the perfect role and Lucy learns that sometimes you can be courageous too.

16. RUTSTEIN, Ali. Illustrated by Niña Nill
Ladybirds Do Not go to daycare. Bright Light, 2023. ISBN: 9781761213113
 It's the first day of day care and Ravi is dressed as his favourite insect , a ladybird and he is certain ladybirds do not go to daycare! He would much rather stay home and eat aphids. With some help from mum he manages to overcome his anxiety and find the courage to take flight.

17. SANDERS, Jess. Illustrated by Irina Avgustinovich
You've got this! (Life Lessons for Little Ones series). Affirm Press, 2023. ISBN: 9781922848581.
 Is there something that's worrying you? Whatever your worries might be, you are not alone in having them. If your worries have ever held you back from doing things, again you are not alone. This book is for any child who needs a reminder that they can be brave, even if they feel scared and worried sometimes.

18. SMYTH, Sarah Elliott. Illustrated by Simon Howe
Go away Glob! Empowering Resources, 2019. ISBN: 9781925592153
 Everyone feels anxious or scared from time to time, it is a normal human emotion. Sometimes however those feelings, that voice in your head can become so powerful that the anxiety, the worry and the self-doubt 'the glob' takes over sucking up all the enjoyment in life. This is what Jimmy experiences until he learns to turn Glob into a manageable and helpful size.

19. SPASEVSKI, Lana. Illustrated by Nicky Johnston
Upside down Friday. EK Books, 2021. ISBN: 9781925820850
 Hugo doesn't like "upside-down-Fridays.' The day is the wrong way round and school becomes a scary place of uncertainty. However a gesture of friendship and understanding from an older student helps, and Hugo begins to feel feels much braver. Changes to routine can make children anxious and worried but kindness and understanding can provide reassurance and empathy.

20. YOUNG, Karen. Illustrated by Norvile Dovidonyte
Hey Awesome. Little Steps Publishing, 2018. ISBN: 9781925545753
 If kids with anxiety could see their strengths, they would feel so much bigger than their anxiety. They would feel bigger than everything - as though a tiny, tip-toed stretch could have them touching the top of the world from where they are. This book is a journey of discovery to show children all kids that everything they need to be brave, strong and brilliant is already in them.

Books for Younger Readers

21. FLYNN, Pat

Tom. (Stuff Happens series). Puffin Books, 2015. ISBN: 9780143308850

Tom is a good tennis player, but he struggles to control his nerves in a match, a problem that began when he double-faulted losing a match to a state-ranked player. He thinks about this all the time, and it is seriously affecting his serv, his game and his life. Can Tom find a way to overcome his anxiety?

'*Stuff Happens*' is a series for boys aged 7-11 as they learn to deal with and overcome a particular challenge. It explores those everyday struggles in life that boys can sometimes be reluctant to express quarrels with mates, a bad day at school, fear of disappointing mum and dad, rejection and not fitting in.

22. MUSGROVE, Marianne

The Worry Tree. Random House Australia Vintage Classics, 2012. ISBN: 9781742757421

Juliet is a worry wort and then behind the wallpaper in her new bedroom, Juliet uncovers a n old painting of a very special tree. Nana remembers it well. It's the Worry Tree, and with the help of a duck called Delia and the other Worry Tree animals, Juliet might just be able solve some of life's big problems.

23. ROY, James. Illustrated by Lucinda Gifford.

Rules are rules. (Chook Doolan series). Walker Books Australia, 2016. ISBN: 9781922244932.

Chook Doolan's big brother is sick, and Chook has to walk to school be himself, but he is much too scared, or chicken in his case, to do that. Then Dad tells him the special 'Walking to School' rule and Chook knows *rules are rules*. What could possibly go wrong?

Young Adults Books

24. FOX, Helena

The quiet and the loud. Pan Macmillan Australia, 2023. ISBN: 9781760983024

George's life is loud. On the water, though, with everything hushed above and below, she is steady, silent. Then her estranged dad says he needs to talk, and George's past begins to wake up, looping around her ankles, trying to drag her under. Everything is a blaring, blazing mess. Could Calliope, the girl who has just cartwheeled into George's world and shot it through with brilliant, dazzling colour, be her calm among the chaos?

Please be aware that this story references topics such as domestic violence, emotional abuse, addiction, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Complex PTSD, and catastrophic fire.

25. GALE, Emily

The Goodbye Year. Text Publishing, 2022. ISBN: 9781922458599.

It's 2020 and Harper is excited about her final year at Riverlark Primary. But one by one things go wrong. Her best friends are made school captains and are so busy they don't seem to have time for her anymore. Her parents take jobs overseas as nurses in a war zone and she is sent off to stay with her grandmother who she barely knows. First there are catastrophic bushfires, and then the pandemic arrives! The worries and disasters just keep coming , and on top of everything else there's the ghost!

Suitable for upper primary

26. GORDON, Kate

Aster's Good Right Things. Riverted Press, 2020. ISBN: 9780648492573

Eleven-year-old Aster attends a school for gifted kids, but she doesn't think she's special at all. If she was, her mother wouldn't have left. Each day Aster must do at least one good, right thing-a challenge she sets herself, to make someone else's life better. Nobody can know about her things, because then they won't count. And if she doesn't do them, she's sure everything will go wrong. Then she meets Xavier. He has his own kind of special missions to make life better. When they do these missions together, Aster feels free, but if she stops doing her good, right things will everything fall apart?

27. MADDEN, Tobias

Wrong Answers Only. Penguin Books, 2024. ISBN: 9780143777403

Almost eighteen-year-old Marco is gay and loves learning so much so that he topped the state in his Year 12 exams. He plans to study biomedicine at university eventually leading to becoming a surgeon. But there's been in his words a 'blip' or rather two severe panic attacks and instead of university he's sent to live on a cruise ship in the Mediterranean with his estranged uncle. Marco's trip is supposed to provide answers but instead there are more questions until his best friend CeCe proposes a new plan for someone who has always done everything right maybe it's time to get a few things wrong....

Please note this book involves same-sex relationships.

Non-Fiction books

28. BERRY, Kathryn. Illustrated by Lisa Diebold.

Basecamp: a fun-filled adventure about managing anxiety. QuirkyKid, 2017. ISBN: 9780994155726

An innovative social and emotional learning programme that helps children aged 7-13 build a repertoire of anxiety management skills. The programme draws on decades of experience and combines a sound cognitive behavioural approach with effective and engaging child-centred activities. (Notes taken from the book)

Basecamp®

29. MEREDITH, Dawn

12 Annoying Monsters: self-talk for kids with anxiety. Shining Press, 2013. ISBN: 9781876870669

So perhaps you feel a bit anxious or worried sometimes or perhaps even a lot of the time. You are not alone, lots of people feel anxious at times. The books outlines what anxiety actually is, why it is a natural thing your body does to protect you and how you can learn to switch it off when it becomes overpowering. Yes – you can control it.