A CBT-Based

School Anxiety Workbook for Children:

30 DAYS WITH RILEY

Small steps to understand worry, build coping skills and make school feel easier

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30 DAYS WITH RILEY

Small steps to understand school worry
and make school feel easier

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MEET RILEY

This is Riley.

Riley is a red panda.

He loves climbing, drawing funny creatures, crunchy snacks and making up ridiculous jokes.

He’s also very good at losing one sock.

MEET RILEY

But lately, there's something Riley has been finding really hard.

School.

Some mornings Riley wakes up and his tummy already feels funny. Sometimes his heart beats fast while he's getting dressed. Sometimes he feels sick. Sometimes he gets cross with everyone. Sometimes he cries. Sometimes he asks the same questions again and again.

"What if something goes wrong?"

"What if I feel sick?"

"What if I can't do it?"

And sometimes Riley can't even explain what's wrong. He just knows that his whole body seems to be shouting:

DON'T GO!

Riley used to think he needed to get rid of all the worry before he could go to school.

But Riley started learning about what was happening inside his body and brain. He learned why worry can feel so strong. He found out what makes it louder. He tried lots of different things.

MEET RILEY

Some helped. Some didn't.

And little by little, Riley learned something really important:

He could feel worried and still know what to do next.

For the next 30 days, you're going to learn alongside Riley.

You don't need to get everything right. You don't need to stop feeling worried.

You're going to find out:

- what your school worry is like
- what makes it louder
- what helps your body
- what helps your thoughts
- what makes mornings easier
- what helps on the way to school
- what helps at the school gate
- who can help you
- what to do when school feels difficult
- what helps after school
- how to take small steps towards things that feel hard

Some things will help you a lot. Some might help a little. Some might not be for you at all. That's okay.

The aim is to find **your** best tools.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Try one day at a time. You don't need to rush.

From Day 2 onwards, each day starts with **YESTERDAY**.

That's because Riley wants you to look back at what you tried. Sometimes something will work straight away. Sometimes it will need another go. Sometimes you'll decide:

"That one isn't for me."

That's useful too. At the end of each day, you'll get one small thing to try. You're not trying to change everything at once.

You're just taking **one step at a time**.

WHEN DOES MY SCHOOL WORRY START?

Riley used to think his worry started when he reached school. Then he started paying closer attention. Sometimes Worry actually appeared the night before. He might ask:

“What are we doing tomorrow?”

“Is PE tomorrow?”

“Who’s taking me?”

Other times, Riley felt fine until the morning. Then someone might say:

“Time to get dressed.”

and suddenly his tummy felt tight. On other days, everything felt okay until he saw the school gate. Riley learned:

If I know when my worry usually starts, I can start helping myself earlier.

WHEN DOES MY SCHOOL WORRY START?

YOUR TURN

When does your school worry usually start?
Circle any that fit.

- ○ the night before
- ○ while I'm getting dressed
- ○ when it's nearly time to leave
- ○ when I see the school
- ○ when I say goodbye
- ○ during lessons
- ○ at lunchtime
- ○ when I wake up
- ○ at breakfast
- ○ on the way to school
- ○ at the school gate
- ○ when I get into class
- ○ at break
- ○ at different times on different days
- ○ I'm not sure yet

The first moment I usually notice school feeling hard is:

WHEN DOES MY SCHOOL WORRY START?

WHY THIS HELPS

If you notice Worry early, you have more time to use something that helps before it gets really loud.

TRY THIS TODAY

Don’t try to change anything yet. Just catch the first moment you notice Worry. When it arrives, quietly think:

“There you are, Worry.”

Tomorrow, you’ll find out what Worry is doing inside your body.

MY BODY HAS AN ALARM

YESTERDAY

When did you first notice your school worry?

Was it earlier than you expected?

○ yes ○ no ○ I'm not sure

TODAY

Riley noticed something strange. Sometimes his tummy felt funny before he'd even thought:

"I'm worried."

He wondered: **"Why does my body do this?"**

Then Riley learned about the body's **alarm system**.

Everyone has one. The alarm's job is to help protect us. If Riley was in real danger, his brain could quickly send messages through his body. His heart might beat faster. His breathing might change. His muscles might get ready to move.

That could help him run, shout, move away or get help. That's useful.

But sometimes the alarm gets confused. It can switch on because something **feels scary**, even when there isn't real danger.

MY BODY HAS AN ALARM

That's what can happen with school worry. Riley thought:

"So my racing heart doesn't mean something terrible is definitely happening?"

No. It means: **"My alarm has switched on."**

The feeling is real. But the danger might not be.

YOUR TURN

What happens when your alarm switches on?
Circle any that happen to you.

- ○ my tummy hurts
- ○ my heart beats fast
- ○ my hands get sweaty
- ○ my head hurts
- ○ I feel dizzy
- ○ I get angry
- ○ I want to hide
- ○ I want someone to stay close
- ○ I feel sick
- ○ my breathing changes
- ○ my legs feel shaky
- ○ I feel hot
- ○ I want to cry
- ○ I go very quiet
- ○ I want to go home

Something else:

The first body clue I usually notice is:

MY BODY HAS AN ALARM

WHY THIS HELPS

If you can spot your first body clue, you can think:

“My alarm is switching on.”

That can stop the feeling from seeming so mysterious.

TRY THIS TODAY

When you notice your first body clue, say: **“That’s my alarm.”**

You don’t need to make it disappear. Just name what’s happening.

AM I SAFE, OR IS MY ALARM LOUD?

YESTERDAY

Did you notice your body alarm?

○ yes ○ a little ○ not yet

What did you notice first?

TODAY

One morning Riley's heart started racing outside school. His first thought was:

"My body feels scared. Maybe I shouldn't go in."

Then Riley remembered his alarm. A scared feeling doesn't always mean danger. So Riley learned to ask:

"AM I SAFE RIGHT NOW?"

Sometimes the answer is: **"Yes. I'm safe. My alarm is loud."**

Sometimes the answer is: **"No. Something really isn't okay. I need help."**

That difference matters. If something is unsafe, Riley shouldn't just try to calm himself down and carry on. He needs to tell an adult he trusts. If something is safe but feels scary, Riley can use a worry tool and take a small step.

AM I SAFE, OR IS MY ALARM LOUD?

YOUR TURN

Read each example.
Circle the best answer.

Someone is hurting me.

○ I'M SAFE - THIS IS MY WORRY ALARM

○ I'M NOT SAFE - I NEED HELP

I feel nervous because I have to answer a question in class.

○ I'M SAFE - THIS IS MY WORRY ALARM

○ I'M NOT SAFE - I NEED HELP

Another child keeps threatening me.

○ I'M SAFE - THIS IS MY WORRY ALARM

○ I'M NOT SAFE - I NEED HELP

My heart is racing because I need to walk through the school gate.

○ I'M SAFE - THIS IS MY WORRY ALARM

○ I'M NOT SAFE - I NEED HELP

Someone is touching me in a way I don't like.

○ I'M SAFE - THIS IS MY WORRY ALARM

○ I'M NOT SAFE - I NEED HELP

AM I SAFE, OR IS MY ALARM LOUD?

I'm worried I might get a maths question wrong.

○ I'M SAFE - THIS IS MY WORRY ALARM

○ I'M NOT SAFE - I NEED HELP

CHECK YOUR THINKING

The unsafe examples are:

someone hurting you

someone threatening you

someone touching you in a way you don't like

Those are times to tell an adult you trust.

Feeling nervous about answering a question, walking through the gate or making a mistake can feel horrible, but those feelings don't mean you're unsafe.

WHY THIS HELPS

You don't want to treat a real problem as "just worry". And you don't want Worry to convince you that every uncomfortable feeling means danger.

TRY THIS TODAY

If your alarm gets loud, ask: **"Am I safe right now?"**

If you are safe: **"I'm safe. My alarm is loud."**

If you aren't safe: **Tell an adult you trust.**

WHICH PART OF SCHOOL IS HARD?

YESTERDAY

Did you ask yourself:
“Am I safe right now?”

○ yes ○ I forgot ○ I didn’t need to

Did it help?

○ yes ○ a little ○ not really

TODAY

Riley often said: **“I hate school.”**

But that was a very big problem to solve. So Riley started looking at school one part at a time. He found out that some parts were okay. Some were difficult. A few were really hard. Riley’s hardest parts were:

- saying goodbye
- noisy lunchtime
- getting answers wrong
- unexpected changes

That helped.

Instead of trying to fix **all of school**, Riley could work on one difficult bit at a time.

WHICH PART OF SCHOOL IS HARD?

YOUR TURN

Put a number next to each one.

1 usually okay
2 sometimes hard
3 really hard

Getting ready	☐	Leaving home	☐
The journey	☐	Seeing the school	☐
The school gate	☐	Saying goodbye	☐
Walking into class	☐	Starting work	☐
Answering questions	☐	Reading aloud	☐
Making mistakes	☐	Break time	☐
Lunchtime	☐	Noise	☐
Crowds	☐	Toilets	☐
PE	☐	Assemblies	☐
Being away from home	☐	Talking to other children	☐
Talking to adults	☐	Changes to the normal day	☐
Home time	☐		

Something else:

WHICH PART OF SCHOOL IS HARD?

My hardest part right now is:

WHY THIS HELPS

“School is hard” is a huge problem.

“I get really worried when I say goodbye” is much easier to work on.

TRY THIS TODAY

Notice your hardest part. Ask: **“What exactly is hard about this bit?”**

You don’t need the perfect answer yet.

WHAT DOES WORRY SAY?

YESTERDAY

The part of school I noticed most was:

What seemed to make it hard?

TODAY

Riley started listening to what Worry actually said.

Before maths: **“You’ll get everything wrong.”**

Before break: **“Nobody will want to play with you.”**

At the gate: **“You won’t cope.”**

Before lunch: **“You’ll feel sick.”**

Riley used to hear a thought and believe it straight away. Then he learned:

A worried thought is something your brain is saying. It isn’t automatically true.

Riley learned three steps.

WHAT DOES WORRY SAY?

1. CATCH IT
What is Worry saying?

↓

2. CHECK IT
Is that definitely what will happen?

↓

3. CHANGE IT
What's a fairer and more helpful thought?

Here's what Riley did.

WORRY SAID:
"I'm going to get every answer wrong."

RILEY CHECKED:
Has that happened before?
No.
Does Riley sometimes know answers?
Yes.
Can he ask for help?
Yes.

RILEY CHANGED IT TO:
"I might get some answers wrong, but I'll probably know some too. If I get stuck, I can ask for help."

That thought wasn't pretending everything would be perfect. It was just more accurate.

WHAT DOES WORRY SAY?

YOUR TURN

CATCH IT

My Worry says:
“What if ...?”

CHECK IT

Do I know for certain this will happen?

○ yes ○ no ○ I’m not sure

Has anything different happened before?

What could I do if the difficult thing did happen?

WHAT DOES WORRY SAY?

CHANGE IT

Make a thought that is helpful **and believable**.

You can start with:

"I might

_____

but I can

_____."

or

"This might feel hard, but

_____

_____."

My new thought:

_____

_____

_____

MORE EXAMPLES

Worry:

"Nobody will play with me."

More helpful:

"I might not find someone straight away, but I can look for someone I know, try my Plan B or ask an adult for help."

WHAT DOES WORRY SAY?

Worry:

“I’ll feel sick and I’ll have to go home.”

More helpful:

“Worry can make me feel sick. I can have a drink, use my body tool and tell an adult if I need help.”

Worry:

“Everyone will laugh if I get it wrong.”

More helpful:

“I might get something wrong, but mistakes happen in class. Most people will carry on with their own work.”

Worry:

“I can’t go through the gate.”

More helpful:

“The gate feels really hard, but I can follow my arrival plan one step at a time.”

WHY THIS HELPS

You aren’t trying to force yourself to think: **“Everything will be amazing!”**

Your brain probably won’t believe that. You’re finding a thought that says:

“There’s another way to look at this, and I know what I can do.”

TRY THIS TODAY

Catch one worry thought. Change it into a fairer thought. Then use the new thought when Worry comes back.

USE THE NEW THOUGHT

YESTERDAY

My worry thought was:

My new thought was:

Did I remember to use it?

○ yes ○ a little ○ I forgot

Did it help at all?

○ yes ○ a little ○ not really

TODAY

Riley tried his new maths thought. Worry said: **“You’re going to get everything wrong.”**

Riley answered: **“I might get some wrong, but I can start with what I know and ask for help.”**

Riley still felt nervous. But then he answered the first question. Then the second. He did get one wrong. He also got several right. Riley learned:

A helpful thought doesn’t need to make me feel completely calm.

USE THE NEW THOUGHT

Its job is to help me **do something useful next**.

YOUR TURN

Think about a worry you had recently.

WORRY SAID:

A MORE HELPFUL THOUGHT:

BECAUSE OF THAT THOUGHT, I COULD:

- ○ start
- ○ ask for help
- ○ take the next step
- ○ stay
- ○ try again
- ○ something else:

What did you do?

USE THE NEW THOUGHT

What actually happened?

WHY THIS HELPS

Helpful thinking and helpful action work best together. For example:

“I can ask for help if I’m stuck.”

Then: **Ask for help.**

“I can walk to the teacher even if I’m worried.”

Then: **Walk to the teacher.**

TRY THIS TODAY

Use one helpful thought. Then do one small action that matches it.

HELP MY BODY SETTLE

YESTERDAY

Did you use a helpful thought?

○ yes ○ a little ○ I forgot

What did you do next?

Did it help you take a step?

○ yes ○ a little ○ not yet

TODAY

Riley understood his worry better. But knowing about it didn't magically make his body calm. One morning his heart was racing and his shoulders were tight.

Someone said: **"Just calm down."**

Riley thought: **"If I could just do that, I would!"**

So Riley tried something much smaller. He put both feet on the floor. He pressed them down. He let his shoulders drop. Then he breathed out slowly. His worry didn't disappear. But his body felt a little less tense. That was enough to help him put his shoes on.

HELP MY BODY SETTLE

TRY RILEY'S RESET

1. Put both feet on the floor.

2. Press them down gently.

3. Let your shoulders drop.

4. Breathe in gently.

5. Breathe out slowly.

6. Do it three times.

How did your body feel before?

very tense	in the middle	fairly calm

How does it feel now?

very tense	in the middle	fairly calm

HELP MY BODY SETTLE

WHY THIS HELPS

When your alarm switches on, your body gets ready for danger. Slow breathing, relaxed muscles and feeling the floor under your feet can send your body a different message:

“I’m here. I’m safe right now.”

You don’t need to become completely calm. You’re just turning the alarm down enough to take the next step.

TRY THIS TODAY

Use Riley’s reset once when you’re already feeling okay. That makes it easier to remember later when Worry is loud.

FIND THE BODY TOOL THAT SUITS YOU

YESTERDAY

Did you try Riley's reset?

○ yes ○ I forgot ○ I didn't want to

Did it help?

○ a lot ○ a little ○ not really

TODAY

Riley tried slow breathing again. Sometimes it helped. Sometimes sitting still made him feel even more restless. So Riley tried pushing both hands against a wall. He pushed for five seconds. Rested. Then did it again.

Afterwards his body felt less full of nervous energy. Riley learned:

Different bodies like different tools.

There isn't one perfect way to calm Worry.

FIND THE BODY TOOL THAT SUITS YOU

YOUR TURN

Try at least three.

TOOL 1 - FEET

Press your feet firmly into the floor for five seconds.

Did I like it? ☺ 😐 ☹

TOOL 2 - WALL PUSH

Push both hands against a wall.
Hold.
Relax.
Repeat.

Did I like it? ☺ 😐 ☹

TOOL 3 - SLOW BREATH OUT

Breathe in gently.
Make your breath out a little slower.

Did I like it? ☺ 😐 ☹

FIND THE BODY TOOL THAT SUITS YOU

TOOL 4 - SHAKE IT OUT

Shake your hands and arms for ten seconds.
Then stop.

Did I like it? ☺ 😐 ☹

TOOL 5 - SQUEEZE AND RELEASE

Squeeze both fists.
Hold.
Let go.
Repeat three times.

Did I like it? ☺ 😐 ☹

TOOL 6 - MOVE

Walk around, stretch or march on the spot.

Did I like it? ☺ 😐 ☹

My favourite body tool was:

FIND THE BODY TOOL THAT SUITS YOU

WHY THIS HELPS

If one tool doesn't help, that doesn't mean nothing will help.

You're finding out what **your body** responds to.

TRY THIS TODAY

Use your favourite body tool once when Worry appears. Ask:

"Did this make the next step easier?"

MAKE TOMORROW EASIER TONIGHT

YESTERDAY

My favourite body tool was:

Did I use it?

○ yes ○ no

Did it make the next step easier?

○ yes ○ a little ○ not really

TODAY

One morning Riley couldn't find his shoes. Then his water bottle was missing. Then he remembered he needed his PE kit. Everyone started rushing. Worry got louder. That evening Riley tried something different. He:

- put his shoes by the door
- packed his bag
- checked the next day's timetable
- put his PE kit ready

The next morning Riley still felt worried. But he wasn't also searching for missing things.

His alarm had **less to deal with**.

MAKE TOMORROW EASIER TONIGHT

YOUR TURN

Which things could make your morning easier?

- ○ pack my bag
- ○ put out my clothes
- ○ put my shoes somewhere easy to find
- ○ check what lessons I have
- ○ check if anything unusual is happening
- ○ put my water bottle ready
- ○ get my PE kit ready
- ○ choose breakfast
- ○ put something important by the door
- ○ ask a grown-up one question about tomorrow

The one thing that would help me most is:

MAKE TOMORROW EASIER TONIGHT

WHY THIS HELPS

Worry already uses lots of brain power. The fewer extra problems you have to solve in the morning, the easier it can be to keep moving.

TRY THIS TODAY

Prepare **one thing** tonight.

One is enough.

SMALL CHANGES STILL COUNT

YESTERDAY

What did you get ready?

Did it make the morning:

easier | about the same | harder

What did you notice?

TODAY

The next morning Riley was still worried. At first he thought:

“Getting ready last night didn’t work.”

Then he noticed something. He hadn’t searched for his shoes. Nobody had rushed around looking for his PE kit. He already knew what was happening that day. The morning wasn’t easy.

But it was **a little easier**.

SMALL CHANGES STILL COUNT

Riley learned to stop asking: **“Did this get rid of all my anxiety?”**

Instead he asked: **“Did this help even a little?”**

YOUR TURN

Something that makes mornings harder:

Something that makes mornings easier:

A small change I could try:

WHY THIS HELPS

A strategy doesn’t have to fix everything to be worth keeping. If something makes the morning even a little easier, that matters.

TRY THIS TODAY

Choose one small thing that could make tomorrow morning easier.

JUST THE NEXT STEP

YESTERDAY

What small change did you try?

Did it help?

yes | a little | not really

Would you use it again?

○ yes ○ maybe ○ no

TODAY

Riley often woke up and thought about the **whole school day**.

Get dressed. Leave home. Travel to school. Say goodbye. Lessons. Break. Lunch. More lessons. Home time. It felt enormous. Then Riley learned:

He didn't have to do the whole day at once.

When Riley was lying in bed, his job wasn't to cope with lunchtime.

His job was: **Sit up.**

Then: **Feet on the floor.**

Then: **Get dressed.**

JUST THE NEXT STEP

Riley started saying: **“JUST THE NEXT STEP.”**

YOUR TURN

Write or draw your morning steps.

1

2

3

4

5

6

Which step feels hardest?

What comes just before it?

JUST THE NEXT STEP

WHY THIS HELPS

Thinking about the whole day can make Worry feel huge. Thinking about one small step gives your brain something clear to do.

TRY THIS TODAY

When your brain jumps ahead, say: **“I don’t need to do the whole day right now. Just the next step.”**

Then do that step.

MAKE A MORNING PLAN

YESTERDAY

Did you remember:
“Just the next step”?

○ yes ○ a little ○ I forgot

Did it help?

○ yes ○ a little ○ not really

TODAY

Riley liked the next-step idea. So he made a simple morning plan. He drew:

When Worry started talking about the school gate while Riley was still eating breakfast, he looked at his plan. He thought:

MAKE A MORNING PLAN

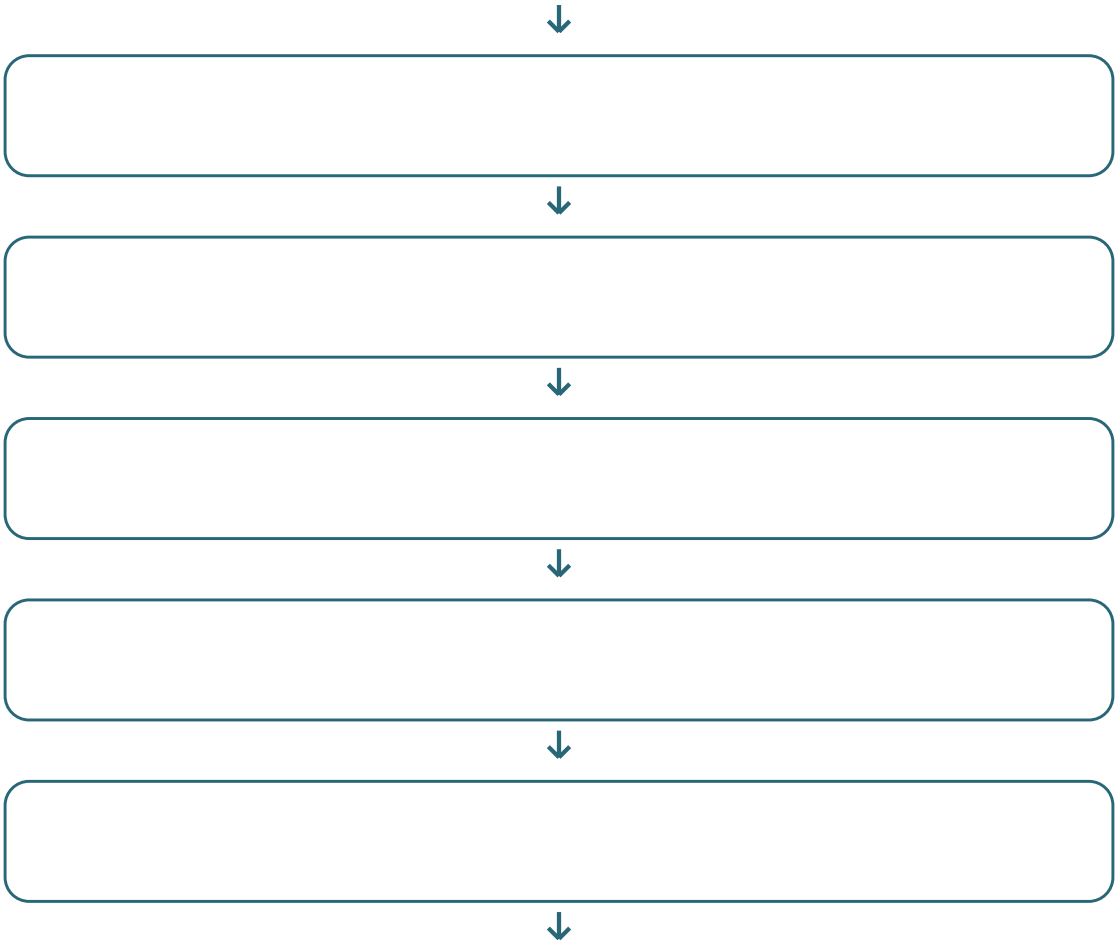
“I don’t need to deal with the gate yet. I’m on breakfast.”

That helped Riley stay with what he was doing.

YOUR TURN

Make your own morning plan.

Wake up



Leave home

MAKE A MORNING PLAN

The part I may need help with is:

Who could help?

WHY THIS HELPS

A plan means you don't have to make lots of decisions while you're worried. You can simply look at what comes next.

TRY THIS TODAY

Put your morning plan somewhere you can see it. Use it tomorrow.

GIVE YOUR BRAIN A JOB ON THE WAY

YESTERDAY

Did you use your morning plan?

○ yes ○ partly ○ no

What worked best?

What would you change?

TODAY

The journey to school was hard for Riley. He used to spend the whole way thinking:

“What if I cry?”

“What if I feel sick?”

“What if today is awful?”

By the time Riley arrived, Worry had had ten whole minutes to keep making scary guesses. So Riley gave his brain another job. He looked for:

GIVE YOUR BRAIN A JOB ON THE WAY

3 blue things
2 dogs
1 funny sign

He still knew he was going to school. But he wasn't spending every second thinking about it.

YOUR TURN

Choose one journey job.

- ○ play I Spy
- ○ count red cars
- ○ find five things beginning with one letter
- ○ listen to one favourite song
- ○ count dogs
- ○ find every letter in my name
- ○ look for five unusual things
- ○ tell someone three funny facts
- ○ listen to something funny
- ○ make up a silly story
- ○ name five things I can see, four I can hear and three I can feel

GIVE YOUR BRAIN A JOB ON THE WAY

My own idea:

WHY THIS HELPS

The aim isn't to pretend school doesn't exist. It's to stop giving Worry the entire journey to repeat the same scary thoughts.

TRY THIS TODAY

Use one journey job. Tomorrow, decide whether it helped.

KEEP WHAT WORKS

YESTERDAY

What journey job did you try?

_____

_____

Did it make the journey:

easier

about the same

harder

Would you use it again?

○ yes ○ maybe ○ no

TODAY

Riley tried two different journey ideas. Slow music didn't help much. It left too much space for Worry to think. A fast spotting game helped much more. Riley learned:

"I don't have to keep using something just because someone says it helps anxiety."

He could ask: **"Does this help me?"**

KEEP WHAT WORKS

YOUR TURN

A journey tool I want to keep:

One I don't need:

Another one I could try:

WHY THIS HELPS

Your toolkit should contain things that actually help **you**.

Not every child needs the same tools.

TRY THIS TODAY

Use the best journey tool you've found so far.

MAKE A SCHOOL-GATE PLAN

YESTERDAY

Which journey tool worked best?

Did you use it again?

○ yes ○ no

TODAY

The school gate was often Riley's hardest moment. His alarm could suddenly shout:

"GO HOME!"

Riley noticed something. When everyone stood at the gate asking:

"Are you going in?"
"Do you want another minute?"
"Are you sure?"

it gave Worry more time to argue. So Riley and the adults made a clear plan. When Riley arrived:

1. His teacher met him.
2. Riley said goodbye.
3. Riley carried the class register.
4. Riley went straight inside.

There was less waiting. Less deciding. Riley knew exactly what happened next.

MAKE A SCHOOL-GATE PLAN

YOUR TURN

WHEN I ARRIVE AT SCHOOL...

The person who can meet or help me is:

The place I go first is:

The first thing I can do is:

A small job that could help me get started:

MAKE A SCHOOL-GATE PLAN

My arrival plan is:

Arrive

WHY THIS HELPS

The gate can be hard because Worry wants you to stop, think, wait and turn back. A clear plan helps you keep moving through the hardest moment.

TRY THIS TODAY

Follow your arrival plan as closely as you can. You don't need to wait until you feel ready.

MAKE GOODBYE SHORT AND CLEAR

YESTERDAY

Did you try your arrival plan?

○ yes ○ partly ○ not yet

What helped?

What needs changing?

TODAY

Riley hated saying goodbye. Sometimes he asked for another hug. Then another.

Then: **“One more.”**

Each hug helped for a few seconds. But leaving became harder and harder. Riley and his grown-up made a short routine:

MAKE GOODBYE SHORT AND CLEAR

Hug.
“See you after school.”
Wave.
Go.

Riley still felt sad. But he knew exactly what would happen. And once the goodbye was over, he could start settling into school.

YOUR TURN

Make your goodbye routine.

1

2

3

MAKE GOODBYE SHORT AND CLEAR

Our goodbye words could be:

Would you like a:

- ○ hug
- ○ wave
- ○ funny phrase
- ○ high five
- ○ special hand signal
- ○ something else:

WHY THIS HELPS

A goodbye can be loving without being long. Knowing exactly what happens can make it easier to move on to the next part.

TRY THIS TODAY

Use the same short goodbye.

Then notice what happens **five minutes later**.

FIND YOUR SCHOOL PEOPLE

YESTERDAY

How did goodbye go?

How did you feel five minutes later?

Was anything different from what Worry predicted?

FIND YOUR SCHOOL PEOPLE

TODAY

Riley used to think being brave meant coping by himself. Then one lunchtime he felt overwhelmed. The room was noisy. His body felt tense. He wanted to run out. Instead Riley told a teaching assistant:

“It’s too noisy for me.”

She helped him sit somewhere quieter. Riley still stayed for lunch. He learned:

Getting help can make a difficult step possible.

YOUR TURN

MY SCHOOL PEOPLE

An adult I can talk to:

Another adult I can talk to:

Someone I can find at break:

Someone who knows me well:

FIND YOUR SCHOOL PEOPLE

Someone who could help if I'm upset:

WHY THIS HELPS

It's much easier to ask for help if you already know **who** you can go to.

TRY THIS TODAY

Say hello to one of your school people. You don't have to wait until you're very worried.

KNOW WHAT TO SAY

YESTERDAY

Which school person did you connect with?

How did that feel?

easy | a little awkward | difficult

TODAY

One day Riley needed help. His teacher asked: **“What’s wrong?”**

Riley’s mind went blank. He couldn’t explain everything. So Riley made a few short sentences he could use. He didn’t need a long speech. He just needed a way to get started.

KNOW WHAT TO SAY

YOUR TURN

Circle the ones you could use.

"I'm feeling worried."

"Can you help me?"

"I don't know what to do."

"Can you explain that again?"

"It's too noisy."

"Can I have a quiet minute?"

"I need help getting started."

"Can you stay with me for a moment?"

"Something happened and I need to tell you."

KNOW WHAT TO SAY

My own sentence:

Which one feels easiest to say?

Say it out loud once.

WHY THIS HELPS

When Worry is loud, finding the right words can be hard. Having one sentence ready means you don't have to think of it on the spot.

TRY THIS TODAY

Use your chosen help sentence if you need it. If saying it feels too hard, show it to an adult on paper.

WHEN WORK FEELS TOO BIG

YESTERDAY

Did you use your help sentence?

- ○ yes
- ○ I wanted to but couldn't
- ○ I didn't need it
- ○ I forgot

If you used it, what happened?

TODAY

Riley sometimes looked at a page of work and thought:

"I can't do this."

Then he'd stop before he'd even started. His teacher taught him one question:

"WHAT'S THE FIRST BIT?"

Sometimes the first bit was: **Write your name.**

Sometimes: **Read Question 1.**

Sometimes: **Ask what the question means.**

Riley stopped trying to finish the whole task inside his head. He only found the first small action.

WHEN WORK FEELS TOO BIG

YOUR TURN

When work feels too big, I can:

- ○ read the first question only
- ○ underline what I need to do
- ○ do the easiest bit first
- ○ ask for a clue
- ○ look at an example
- ○ ask someone to explain it differently
- ○ ask, “What’s the first thing I need to do?”
- ○ take a short pause, then return

My best “getting started” tool might be:

WHEN WORK FEELS TOO BIG

WHY THIS HELPS

Sometimes **“I can’t do it”** actually means: **“I don’t know how to start.”**

Finding the first bit makes the task smaller.

TRY THIS TODAY

If work feels too big, ask: **“What’s the first bit?”**

Do only that first. Then find the next one.

WHEN I GET SOMETHING WRONG

YESTERDAY

Did you use:
“What’s the first bit?”

○ yes ○ no

Did it help you start?

○ yes ○ a little ○ not really

TODAY

Riley hated getting things wrong. Sometimes he stayed quiet even when he thought he knew the answer. One day Riley answered a question. It was wrong. His face went hot.

Worry said: **“Everyone noticed!”**

Then someone else answered. The teacher carried on. A few minutes later, everyone was doing something different. Riley learned:

Mistakes can feel enormous inside your own head, even when everyone else moves on quickly.

WHEN I GET SOMETHING WRONG

YOUR TURN

Something I worry about getting wrong:

What do I think would happen?

If my friend made the same mistake, what would I say to them?

Could I say that to myself too?

WHEN I GET SOMETHING WRONG

TRY THIS PHRASE

If you make a small mistake:

"Okay. What next?"

Not:

"I'm stupid."

Not:

"I've ruined everything."

Just:

"Okay. What next?"

WHY THIS HELPS

The aim isn't to enjoy mistakes. It's to learn that you can make one and keep going.

TRY THIS TODAY

If you make a mistake, notice what actually happens afterwards. Does everyone keep thinking about it? Or does the day carry on?

MAKE A BREAK-TIME PLAN

YESTERDAY

Did you make a small mistake yesterday?

What happened afterwards?

Did the problem feel:

- ○ smaller than Worry predicted
- ○ about the same
- ○ bigger

MAKE A BREAK-TIME PLAN

TODAY

Riley found break time difficult. Lessons had a clear plan. Break didn't. Who should he play with? What if his friend was away? What if everyone was already doing something? So Riley made three plans.

PLAN A
Find Jay and play football.

PLAN B
Go to the drawing bench.

PLAN C
Find Mr Khan if he feels stuck.

Now one small problem didn't mean the whole break was ruined.

YOUR TURN

PLAN A

Someone I could find:

Something we could do:

MAKE A BREAK-TIME PLAN

PLAN B

If Plan A doesn't work, I could:

PLAN C

If I still feel stuck, I can go to:

WHY THIS HELPS

Worry loves: **"What if my plan doesn't work?"**

Having a Plan B and C means you already know what you can do next.

TRY THIS TODAY

Try one part of your break-time plan. Afterwards, decide if you want to keep it or change it.

WHEN SCHOOL FEELS TOO BUSY

YESTERDAY

Which break-time plan did you use?

- ○ Plan A
- ○ Plan B
- ○ Plan C
- ○ I didn't need one
- ○ none worked

What would you change next time?

TODAY

Riley thought lunchtime was difficult because he was "too anxious". Then he paid more attention. He noticed:

WHEN SCHOOL FEELS TOO BUSY

chairs scraping
lots of voices
food smells
people moving around
cutlery clattering
children sitting close together

His brain was dealing with **a lot at once**.

Riley asked if he could sit at the end of a quieter table. It didn't make lunchtime perfect. But it made it manageable enough for him to stay.

YOUR TURN

What can make school feel too much for you?

- ○ loud voices
- ○ bright lights
- ○ lots of people moving
- ○ people sitting too close
- ○ lots of instructions at once
- ○ something else:
- ○ crowds
- ○ strong smells
- ○ waiting in a line
- ○ scratchy or uncomfortable clothes
- ○ unexpected changes

WHEN SCHOOL FEELS TOO BUSY

One busy part of school I find hard:

One small change that might help:

Who could I ask about it?

WHY THIS HELPS

Sometimes the answer isn't: **"Try harder to cope."**

Sometimes a small change in the situation can make a big difference.

TRY THIS TODAY

Ask for or try one small change that could make a busy part of school easier.

WHEN I MISS HOME

YESTERDAY

What small change did you try?

Did it help?

○ yes ○ a little ○ not really

What would you try next time?

TODAY

Sometimes Riley missed home so much that Worry said:

“YOU NEED TO GO HOME NOW.”

Riley made a small reminder card. On one side he drew home. On the other he wrote:

“Home is still there. I’ll see everyone later.”

When he missed home, Riley held the card. He still missed his family. But he remembered:

Missing someone doesn’t mean I’m in danger.

WHEN I MISS HOME

He also chose one thing to look forward to after school. That gave his brain something clear to remember:

“This school day has an end.”

YOUR TURN

Someone I miss when I’m at school:

Something that reminds me I’ll see them again:

Something I can look forward to after school:

WHEN I MISS HOME

MAKE YOUR REMINDER

Draw or write something you could keep in your pocket, bag or mind.

A sentence I could use:

“I miss

_____

and I’ll see them

_____.”

WHEN I MISS HOME

WHY THIS HELPS

The aim isn't to stop missing someone. It's to remind your brain:

"I can miss them and still get through this part of the day."

TRY THIS TODAY

Use your reminder once if you miss home.

WHEN WORRY SAYS “GET OUT!”

YESTERDAY

Did you use your reminder?

○ yes ○ no

Did it help?

○ yes ○ a little ○ not really

TODAY

Riley noticed something tricky. When a safe situation felt scary, Worry often said:

“Leave!”

If Riley left straight away, he felt better. That made Worry think:

“See! Leaving kept us safe.”

Then the next time Riley faced the same situation, the alarm was even louder. So Riley started trying something different. He didn’t force himself to do the hardest thing.

He picked a **small safe step** and stayed with it.

For example: Instead of leaving school completely, Riley stayed with his teacher for another five minutes. Instead of running out of the dining hall, he moved to the quieter table. Instead of refusing the whole lesson, he did the first question. Riley learned:

“I can make the step smaller without giving up completely.”

WHEN WORRY SAYS “GET OUT!”

YOUR TURN

Something safe that I often want to get away from:

What do I usually do?

What could be a smaller step instead?

For example:

Instead of leaving the whole lesson, I could ask for a two-minute break and then come back.

My small step:

WHEN WORRY SAYS “GET OUT!”

WHY THIS HELPS

If you always escape safe things, your brain doesn’t get the chance to learn:

“I can cope with this.”

Small steps help your alarm learn something new.

TRY THIS TODAY

Choose one **safe but difficult** thing.

Try one small step instead of giving up on the whole thing. You can still ask an adult for support.

BUILD A SMALL-STEP LADDER

YESTERDAY

What safe difficult thing did you work on?

What small step did you try?

What happened?

TODAY

Riley wanted to walk into school without his grown-up. But that goal felt far too big. So Riley made a ladder.

RILEY'S LADDER

BUILD A SMALL-STEP LADDER

1. Walk to the gate with Dad.
2. Stand just inside the gate with Dad nearby.
3. Walk ten steps with the teacher.
4. Walk to the classroom with the teacher.
5. Walk from the gate without Dad.

Riley didn't jump to Step 5. He started where the challenge felt difficult but possible. Then he repeated it.

YOUR TURN

My bigger goal is:

BUILD A SMALL-STEP LADDER

STEP 1 - EASIEST USEFUL STEP

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5 - BIGGER STEP

Which step feels hard but possible?

That's the one to start with.

BUILD A SMALL-STEP LADDER

WHY THIS HELPS

If a step is far too hard, you may feel defeated before you begin. If it's too easy, your brain may not learn anything new. Look for:

"This makes me nervous, but I think I could try it."

TRY THIS TODAY

Try one manageable step. You don't need to move up the ladder tomorrow. You can repeat the same step.

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN I TRIED?

YESTERDAY

My ladder step was:

Did I try it?

○ yes ○ partly ○ not yet

Before I tried it, Worry said:

TODAY

Riley tried standing just inside the school gate. Beforehand Worry said:

“You’ll panic and have to run back.”

Riley’s worry felt very strong. He stood there with Dad nearby. At first, nothing changed. He still felt worried. Then his teacher started talking to him about a class project. After a while Riley noticed he hadn’t been thinking about the gate for a few moments.

He didn’t suddenly love being there. But he had stayed. Riley learned:

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN I TRIED?

“I don’t need every step to feel easy. I need to find out what really happens when I try.”

YOUR TURN

BEFORE

My worry said:

I thought this would happen:

WHAT I DID

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN I TRIED?

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

AFTER

Something that was easier than I expected:

Something that was still hard:

Something I learned:

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN I TRIED?

WHY THIS HELPS

Worry learns from what you **do**, not only from what people tell you.

Each time you try a safe step, your brain collects new information.

TRY THIS TODAY

If the step was manageable, try it again. Repeating a step is not failing. It's how your brain gets used to something new.

HELP MY BODY AFTER SCHOOL

YESTERDAY

Did you repeat your ladder step?

- ○ yes
- ○ no
- ○ I tried a different step

Was anything easier the second time?

TODAY

After a hard school day, Riley sometimes came home and snapped at everyone. Other days he didn't want to talk. His grown-up used to ask straight away:

"How was school?"
"What happened?"
"Was it okay?"

Riley often couldn't answer. His brain had spent all day dealing with lessons, noise, people, rules, changes and Worry.

So Riley started having a short **after-school reset**.

HELP MY BODY AFTER SCHOOL

Some days he had a snack and sat quietly. Some days he changed into comfortable clothes. Sometimes he moved around outside. Sometimes he drew. After a little while, talking became easier.

YOUR TURN

What does your body usually need after school?

- ○ food
- ○ drink
- ○ quiet
- ○ movement
- ○ music
- ○ drawing
- ○ outside time
- ○ screen time
- ○ comfortable clothes
- ○ reading
- ○ talking
- ○ not talking yet
- ○ being alone for a little while
- ○ spending time with a pet
- ○ something else:

The first thing I'd like after school is:

HELP MY BODY AFTER SCHOOL

I'd rather talk about my day:

- ○ straight away
- ○ after a short break
- ○ later
- ○ only when there's something important to talk about

WHY THIS HELPS

Needing a break after school doesn't mean the day went badly. Your body and brain may simply need time to settle.

TRY THIS TODAY

Choose one thing your body needs after school. Try that before answering lots of questions about your day.

FIND YOUR BEST TOOLS

YESTERDAY

What did you try after school?

Did it help you settle?

○ yes ○ a little ○ not really

Would you use it again?

○ yes ○ maybe ○ no

TODAY

Riley looked back at everything he'd tried. Some tools helped a lot. Some helped a little. Some didn't help him at all.

Riley's list looked like this:

Really helpful

- wall pushes
- getting his bag ready
- the spotting game
- meeting his teacher at the gate
- the quieter lunch table

FIND YOUR BEST TOOLS

Helps sometimes

- slow breathing
- reminder card

Not for me

- calm music on the journey

Riley learned: **“I don’t need every anxiety tool. I need the ones that work for me.”**

YOUR TURN

REALLY HELPS ME

1.

2.

3.

HELPS A LITTLE

1.

2.

FIND YOUR BEST TOOLS

NOT FOR ME

1.

2.

I STILL WANT TO TRY

WHY THIS HELPS

Your toolkit becomes much more useful when you know what to reach for.

TRY THIS TODAY

Choose your **three best tools**.

Tell a grown-up what they are.

MAKE A PLAN FOR REALLY HARD DAYS

YESTERDAY

My three best tools are:

1.

2.

3.

Did I tell someone?

○ yes ○ not yet

TODAY

Riley still had very hard mornings sometimes. Learning about Worry hadn't made him worry-free. So Riley made a plan for the days when his alarm was especially loud.

RILEY'S HARD-DAY PLAN

1. Tell Dad: "My alarm is really loud."

2. Don't talk about the whole school day.

3. Get dressed one step at a time.

4. Do wall pushes.

MAKE A PLAN FOR REALLY HARD DAYS

5. Play the spotting game on the journey.

6. Meet the teacher at the gate.

7. Use the short goodbye.

8. Try the current ladder step.

9. Have quiet time and a snack after school.

The plan meant Riley didn't have to work everything out while he was already overwhelmed.

YOUR TURN

MY HARD-DAY PLAN

When I wake up and Worry is very loud, I can say:

The first thing I need to do is:

My best body tool is:

My best morning tool is:

MAKE A PLAN FOR REALLY HARD DAYS

My best journey tool is:

At the school gate, my plan is:

The adult I can go to is:

My current small step is:

After school, I may need:

MAKE A PLAN FOR REALLY HARD DAYS

WHY THIS HELPS

Hard days are when it's hardest to remember what helps. A written plan means you and the adults around you don't have to start from zero.

TRY THIS TODAY

Show your hard-day plan to an adult who helps you. Ask them to keep a copy if that would help.

LOOK WHAT YOU KNOW NOW

YESTERDAY

Did you show someone your hard-day plan?

○ yes ○ not yet

Who knows how to help me now?

Is there anything I want to change in my plan?

TODAY

Riley looked back at the beginning. At first, all he really knew was:

“School makes me feel horrible.”

Now he knew much more. He knew what his body alarm felt like. He knew the difference between feeling unsafe and actually being unsafe. He knew which parts of school were hardest. He knew what Worry usually said.

LOOK WHAT YOU KNOW NOW

He knew how to make worried thoughts fairer and more helpful. He knew which body tools helped him. He knew how to make mornings less rushed. He had a journey job. He had an arrival plan. He had a short goodbye. He knew who he could ask for help.

He had words he could use. He knew what to do when school work felt too big. He had a plan for break. He knew that noise and crowds could make things harder. He knew what helped when he missed home. He knew how to make a scary step smaller. He had a brave-step ladder.

And he knew what his body needed after school. Worry hadn't completely disappeared. But now Riley could say:

"I know what this feeling is."

"I know what helps me."

"I know who I can ask."

"I can take one step at a time."

YOUR TURN

Something I understand about my worry now:

My first body clue is:

LOOK WHAT YOU KNOW NOW

My biggest school worry is:

Worry often tells me:

A more helpful thought I can use is:

My best body tool is:

My best morning tool is:

My best journey tool is:

My school-gate plan is:

LOOK WHAT YOU KNOW NOW

Someone I can ask for help is:

Words I can use when I need help:

My best after-school reset is:

LOOK WHAT YOU KNOW NOW

Something I can do now that used to feel harder:

Something I'm proud of:

The next small step I want to work on is:

RILEY'S MESSAGE TO YOU

"When we started, I thought the goal was to stop being worried. Now I know something different. Worry is an alarm. Sometimes it's useful. Sometimes it gets too loud. I can listen to what my body is telling me without believing every scary thought.

I can check whether I'm safe. I can use things that help my body settle. I can make things smaller. I can ask for help. I can take the next step. Some days are still hard. A hard day doesn't mean I'm back at the beginning. It just means I need to use what I've learned.

And you can too."

MY SCHOOL WORRY TOOLKIT

WHEN MY ALARM STARTS...

My first clue is:

I CAN REMIND MYSELF...

“My alarm is loud. That doesn’t automatically mean I’m in danger.”

My own reminder:

WHEN MY BODY NEEDS HELP...

I can:

MY SCHOOL WORRY TOOLKIT

WHEN WORRY GIVES ME A SCARY THOUGHT...

Worry says:

A fairer thought is:

BEFORE SCHOOL...

It helps when:

ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL...

It helps when:

MY SCHOOL WORRY TOOLKIT

AT THE SCHOOL GATE...

My plan is:

WHEN I NEED HELP...

I can go to:

I can say:

WHEN SCHOOL WORK FEELS TOO BIG...

I can:

MY SCHOOL WORRY TOOLKIT

AT BREAK OR LUNCH...

My plan is:

IF SOMETHING REALLY ISN'T SAFE...

I will tell:

AFTER SCHOOL...

My body usually needs:

THE SMALL STEP I'M WORKING ON NOW...

MY TOP 5 SCHOOL-WORRY TOOLS

Choose the five things from this workbook that help you most.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

A NOTE FOR THE GROWN-UPS HELPING ME

These are the things I want you to know.

When I'm worried, you might notice:

Things that usually help me:

Things that can make it harder:

At the school gate, it helps if:

A NOTE FOR THE GROWN-UPS HELPING ME

When I need a break, it helps if:

When I get home from school, I may need:

One step I'm working on at the moment:

Please help me by:

I COMPLETED
30 DAYS WITH RILEY

This certificate belongs to:

I've spent 30 days learning about my school worry.

I've learned what my body alarm feels like.

I've learned how to check worried thoughts.

I've tried different tools.

I've worked out what helps me.

I've found people I can ask for support.

I've learned how to make difficult things into smaller steps.

And I've kept trying even when things felt hard.

SOMETHING I'M PROUD OF:

SOMETHING I'LL KEEP USING:

MY NEXT SMALL STEP:

Date:

FREE PDF DOWNLOAD

30 Days with Riley

30 Days with Riley is a CBT-based school worry and school anxiety workbook for children who find attendance, morning routines, separation, the journey to school or time in class difficult. Riley's story helps young pupils put words to physical anxiety signs and worried thoughts without needing to explain everything perfectly.

Parents, carers, SENCOs, teachers, pastoral teams and child therapists can print the activities for short daily check-ins, wellbeing sessions or home-school support plans. The daily format encourages children to identify triggers, review what helped, build coping tools and take realistic small steps towards feeling more able to manage school.