

CHEEKY WORRIES

'Everyone, however big or small, has cheeky worries.'

FREE GUIDE FOR PARENTS



Illustration © Anne Wilson

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www.cheekyworries.com

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Dear Parent,

Our book was born out of a desire to empower parents to help their children manage worries and make sense of their emotional worlds. We feel passionately about giving parents and children the language to discuss emotional experiences.

In the book, Finn's journey to manage his Cheeky Worries is **founded on psychological principles taken from established psychological models**. We use these principles as the foundation of our school workshops and after much demand we have collated the ideas to create a **free resource** for parents to try at home.

Each section starts with a quotation from the book, the name of the psychological principle the quotation relates to followed by an explanation of the theory and then some suggested exercises for you and your child to try.

Please see our online course for deeper explanations, with videos, quizzes and more exercises. This course will offer you and your child the chance to understand more about worry and to look at the principles that underpin how we think about managing it. It also includes an introduction to different, evidence based techniques, such as mindfulness and compassionate mind training to help children develop their own coping skills.

[\(www.cheekyworries.com/online-course/\)](http://www.cheekyworries.com/online-course/)

Warm wishes

Patrick & Anna



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'Finn is a **normal** boy'

Principle: Normalisation

Normalising worries is simply the process of conveying to readers that having worries is not unusual. By normalising the experience of worries it allows us to construct an idea that the worries, which Finn starts to experience, can happen to anyone.

People of any age can have concerns they are wary to share. This may be down to feelings of shame, embarrassment and guilt about the thought and how it makes them feel. It may be driven by fears that they will be viewed as abnormal or ridiculed. It is often a relief for people who carry the above fears to find out they are not alone in having unusual or frightening thoughts and ideas.

This principle is echoed in the closing pages of the book as Finn realises that **we all have cheeky worries**. This relates to a concept of '**common humanity**', which is explained in more detail below and is a central tenet in compassion focused therapy and self-compassion teachings.

The key message is that normalising worries is not to dismiss them, but to convey that they are common and it is not unusual to have them.

'A **scary** thought'

Principle: What is a thought?

The concepts of thoughts and thinking seem to be a something we understand implicitly. Trying to explain this to children is a challenge as thoughts can feel abstract.

Thoughts are the words, images and ideas that appear in our head. These words are the ones we say to ourselves. They are not heard by anyone else and we have lots of them. People can have different thoughts about the same thing.

Exercise

*Explain the concept of a thought as described above.

*Share some of your thoughts. Try and think of a variety of thoughts and explain how and when they popped into your head. This can sometimes be difficult but here are some to get you going;

"I need to remember to call mum"

"It's warm today"

"This jumper is getting too small for me"

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Draw their attention to the fact that these thoughts, ideas and images popped into your head unsolicited.

*Ask your child to share some of the thoughts they have had today.

'Finn was **scared**'

Principle: What are feelings? How are feelings influenced by thoughts?

Feelings and thoughts are difficult to differentiate for very young children. A simple explanation, which may be helpful, is that thoughts are what we hear in our head and feelings are felt in our bodies.

In the book Finn is feeling fear of a number of things. Fear itself is helpful to recognise and we might notice that when we are scared we feel physical signs like our heart racing and butterflies in our stomach. In the picture below Finn is feeling scared or frightened because he has had a thought that he might get left on the bus. Identifying what children are feeling in their bodies can give you a clue as to what they might be thinking. Some children find it easier to describe bodily sensations rather than thoughts or feeling.



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The important link to make here is that Finn is **FEELING** scared or frightened not because the situation has changed but because he is now thinking about it differently.

In the book, Finn stops sliding on his favourite slide because he has had a thought that has made him feel scared. He has been on the slide without being frightened before. What is different is that he has had an unhelpful thought, which has made him feel frightened and has now stopped him doing something he wants to do.

This is a really important example and a significant underlying principle of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

THOUGHTS can alter how we **FEEL** and subsequently how we **BEHAVE**.

Exercise

Ask your child to look at the following **thoughts**, **feelings** and **behaviours** and see if they can link them correctly.

Thoughts	Feelings	Behaviours
A) "What if I can't make friends."	1) Angry	*) Joking and laughing
B) "My brother took my turn."	2) Excited	***) Refuse to go to school
C) "We're going to the cinema after school."	3) Sad	**) Shout and argue

Answers:
A + 3 + ** / B + 1 + *** / C + 2 + *

These are just examples, but see if you can come up with some more specific ones for your child. This will encourage development of their emotional language and get them used to talking to you about how things are making them feel.

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'Scary thoughts can seem **very frightening**'

Principle: Validation

When dealing with a child disclosing a scary thought a useful technique to support them is validation. It is an important concept described as **'the acknowledgment and acceptance of another person's thoughts, feelings and behaviours as understandable.'** So for example, in the book we see the owl saying that Finn's worries can seem very frightening. This is validation.

It tells a child that a grown-up is taking their concerns seriously and is recognising them in a non-judgemental way. **By saying something must be scary or horrible, it is giving the child permission to talk about it and allows them to feel understood, listened to and not judged that they have been silly.**

Exercise

Remember you are not trying to reassure them but to acknowledge their feelings.

Helpful actions:

Spend time getting the details of your child's concerns correct and summarising these back to them. This demonstrates you are really trying to understand the issues and have listened to their fears.

Helpful phrases;

"That sounds really scary."

"I can see that has made you feel sad."

"That was really brave to tell me about that."

"Tell me a little bit more about how that made you feel."

Unhelpful actions:

Minimising fears, not listening, being dismissive of concerns as stupid or unfounded.

Unhelpful phrases;

"Don't be silly that would never happen."

"Stop worrying."

"Just think of something else."

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'Cheeky worries'

Principle: Externalising

The name Cheeky Worries was Anna's brainwave. As we have seen, worries themselves can be described as thoughts that can make us feel fearful or scared.

Children can have trouble expressing themselves and telling adults they have worries. These worries can manifest themselves as tantrums or other behavioural problems. Cheeky worries is a name that children seem to like and is non-threatening. It gives the child and hopefully parents a shared language to talk about things that are worrying. It also seems to encapsulate some of the characteristics of these types of worry. That they appear uninvited, they can scare us and they don't always tell the truth.

Another advantage of giving these worrying thoughts a name is that it **externalises them**. This is a technique often used in CBT. By giving emotional experiences a name or personifying them, they can be labelled and conceived as outside the individual. This is helpful because it removes a sense of responsibility for having them and makes it easier for children to label them and talk about them. Since starting this project we have heard from parents saying that their children have spoken to them about having “cheeky worries” which then invites a conversation to explore them.

'spot the cheeky worry'

Principle: Identifying worrying thoughts and sharing them

As the owl helps Finn manage his worries, he describes an important first step - **identifying the worries**. Once a child has identified a worry they can tell a grown-up and they can make it seem less frightening.

Our thoughts about this are that if a child feels they can share a worry and an adult listens to the concern and validates it, that it can be very helpful. It also means that an adult can check-in at a later date by asking if there is “any sign of that cheeky worry.”

Exercise

- 1) Refresh the concept of a thought with your child; **an idea, image or words that pop into your head by themselves**.
- 2) Review how different thoughts can make you feel. For example a thought such as, "I don't think other children like me", could make some feel sad. Or "I am going to the zoo tomorrow with my friend", might make someone feel happy or excited.

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- 3) Together, try and come up with three thoughts that might make you feel happy, three thoughts that could make you feel scared and three thoughts that may make you feel excited.
- 4) Share a cheeky worry you have had and ask your child if they have had any.
- 5) Try responding by validating this worry.



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During our school workshops we have been really pleased by how quickly children grasp this concept and we have been told about all sorts of cheeky worries ranging from zombies in bedrooms to being ignored at school.

It has been particularly gratifying hearing stories of children telling teachers about their cheeky worries after the workshop when it is quieter. This has led to one school introducing a cheeky worry boxes into their classrooms.

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'we call them cheeky worries because **they trick us** by telling us something is going to happen, when it doesn't!'

Principle: Thoughts are not fact.

This is a fundamental concept in CBT. We weren't the first to consider this...

"What we hear is opinion not truth, what we see is perspective not fact."

- Marcus Aurelius

Trying to grasp this concept is difficult especially for children. Because Finn has had the thought that there is a monster under his bed, it is hard for him to see that this is not a fact. The owl asks Finn if his thoughts have ever come true as a way of highlighting the **discrepancy between his worries and reality**.

The point being that **THOUGHTS ARE NOT FACTS**. They are ideas or opinions that pop into our head and, as the owl suggests and Finn realises, they can trick us into feeling and behaving in a certain way.

In the book Finn realises that his fears about a monster under his bed have never come true. They are not facts they are scary thoughts. This is why we see him back in his room.



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Exercise

Make a list of worries your child has had and reflect about whether they came true. If they did come true, consider with your child if the outcome was as bad as the fear.

The invitation is to focus on the cheekiness of the worry as it tries to trick them.

For example;

“Look how cheeky that worry was, it tried to trick you that you would get lost in the supermarket but that has never happened, has it?”

We hope that your children will come to the same conclusion as Finn does in the book.

Finn gasped, “So they are cheeky because they try to trick me!”

“Yes,” said the owl, “and because we know they trick you, **that means you don’t need to pay attention to what they say. It might help to say, hello cheeky worry but I’m too busy playing to listen to you.”**

So if I spot a cheeky worry that mummy is going to leave me on the bus, **I can say, Hello, cheeky worry, but I’m too busy driving this bus to listen to you?”**

Principal: Mindfulness practice of ‘letting go.’

We do not have the scope here to describe the theory and practice of mindfulness but there are many free resources on the internet to get a better understanding.

One mindful practice we wanted to describe is that of ‘letting go.’ Mindful practice would be to suggest that unhelpful thoughts are firstly acknowledged head on, but then left to drift on past as you choose not to give them any more attention. People use the analogy of a cloud passing or a leaf drifting down a stream to represent how to think of the thought passing.

In Finn’s case he notices the cheeky worry, waves hello, but does not let it impact on what he is doing.

Exercise

1) If your child mentions a cheeky worry to you at a later time, try this method with them. For example, if the fear is about going to a party, you can say together; **“we see you cheeky worry, but we are going to go to the party and have fun anyway!”**

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2) A method used sometimes to focus children and help them learn to be present and relaxed is **mindful colouring**. There are multiple free resources available but we have included a pencil drawing of our final scene below to practice.

"No matter how big or small we are, we all have cheeky worries"

Principal: Common humanity

One of the key lessons in the book is that we all have cheeky worries. The principal this is based on is known as common humanity. In **compassion focused therapy**, strength and reassurance is gleaned from the idea that life can be a struggle but one that is made easier in the knowledge that we are not alone. More about compassion focused therapy can be found on the **compassionate mind foundation website** (<https://compassionatemind.co.uk/>).

In the book, the owl gives Finn a magic feather to encourage him to manage his cheeky worries. Finn then notices that everyone around him has magic feathers. Realising he is not alone with his worries brings Finn comfort and, as he realises this, he starts to smile and run towards his favourite slide.

Exercise

1) Ask your child to look at the closing picture from the book (below) and circle who has cheeky worries. Children normally circle all those with magic feathers and then they realise that anyone can have worries and start to circle all the people in the picture!

It is a nice lesson to remind them that we all experience worries and that is OK.

2) Finally we would suggest asking your child how they can manage a cheeky worry in future; they can tell a favourite adult or they can choose to acknowledge the worry and carry on doing what they wanted to do – 'letting go'.

Please get in touch with questions, ideas or thoughts about this resource (chitchat@cheekyworries.com).

Warm wishes,

Anna & Patrick.

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