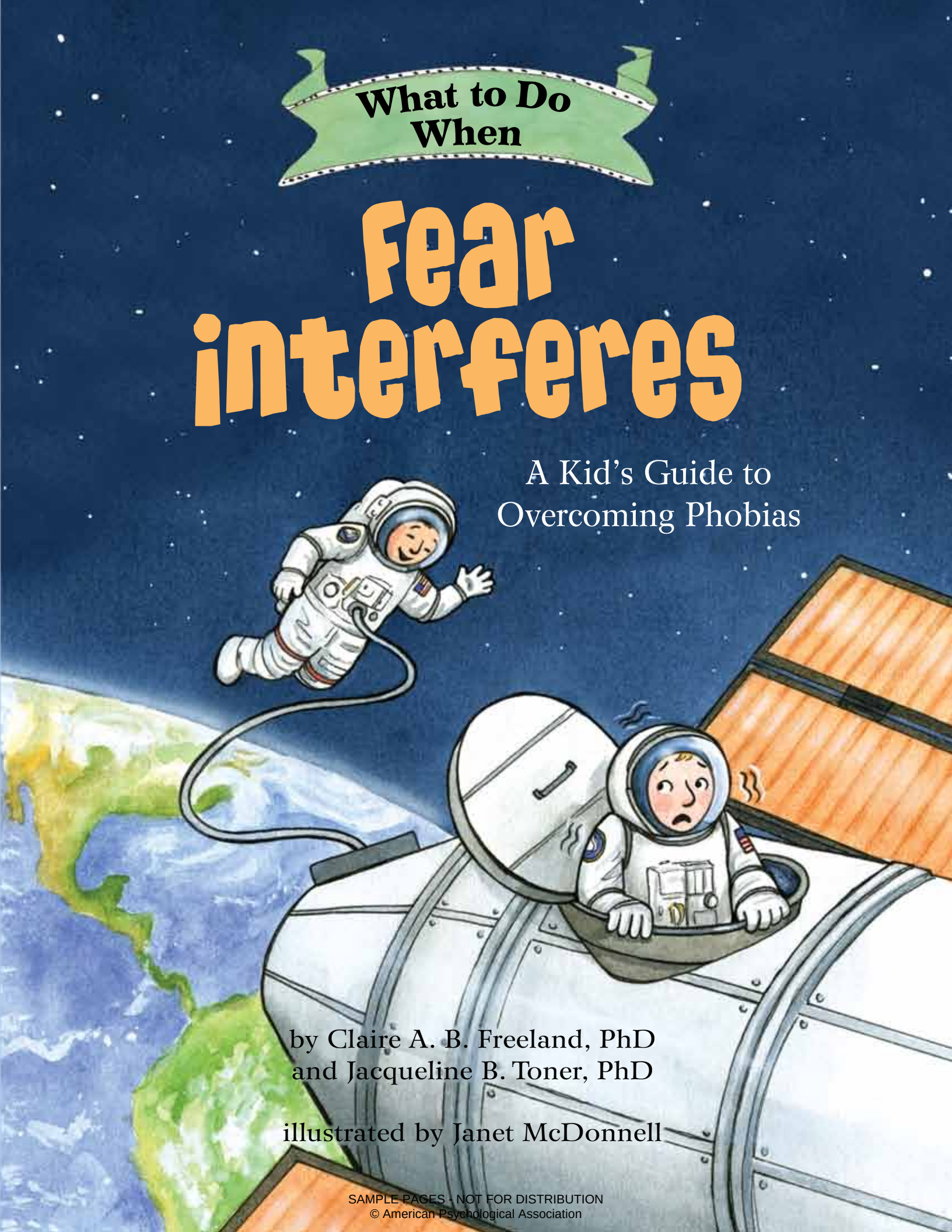


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Introduction to Parents and Caregivers

A child with a phobia about elevators, heights, or vehicles may demand that adults take the stairs with them to visit a high floor of a building, cower far from the edge of a vista overlook, or cry when asked to sit in the car during rush hour. Phobias about medical procedures, such as injections or fears of seeing blood, can make routine doctor appointments exceedingly challenging.

If your child has such intense fears, you know that it does little good to tell them that there's nothing to be afraid of. Pointing out that a high bridge has a sturdy guard rail will not result in their now feeling comfortable to walk across it. Phobias are by definition irrational. That is, while the person experiencing them may be having physical and emotional reactions similar to ones they would have in the face of imminent danger, the situation they are in doesn't present an actual significant threat. So, reassurance of safety does very little to assuage their fears or to convince them to proceed normally with activities that trigger the phobia.



The approach presented in this book will work most effectively with the help of a parent or other adult "coach." An adult with their own intense fear reactions may find it particularly hard to guide a child in overcoming a fear. If this is the case for you, note that the same process presented in this book can work to lessen your own fears. Don't hesitate to enlist the help of your pediatrician or a mental health professional for support or further guidance.

The most effective way to overcome a phobia is exposure, which requires the child to experience the feared object for a period of time long enough for their extreme physical and emotional reactions to dissipate. One of the greatest challenges in helping a child overcome a phobia can be convincing them to hang in there rather than avoid their fear, and to provide support as they do so. It's important to approach the trigger in a modulated way. Initially, you may need to help your child choose tasks that are far removed from the feared experience, such as imagining a thunderstorm or looking at pictures of insects. Taking it slowly and letting your child experience success by overcoming mildly frightening versions of scary situations will allow them to build confidence in facing increasingly more feared situations.

Phobias can result from frightening or traumatic experiences but, more often, they don't have a known source. Children who tend to be anxious may be particularly likely to develop a specific phobia. You might find other books in the ***What-to-do Guides for Kids*** series helpful to address related emotional challenges.

Children are particularly susceptible to developing vicarious fears. This happens when they observe another person reacting with intense fear. Or, a fear can develop vicariously by watching a movie where another is afraid or even from a news report that accentuates the damage caused by a storm or the abundance of a particular illness this season.

As you help your child gradually face feared experiences, be cognizant of messages in their world that may serve to reinforce their fears. Gently redirect adult conversation about impending weather events, recent accidents, or out-of-control animals. Judiciously monitor your child's experiences with frightening messages they receive through the media. When such messages permeate your best defenses, counter them with more realistic views of possible danger and how they will stay safe.

By developing positive self-talk, your child can learn to focus on rational thinking and self-cheerleading to encourage themselves to proceed with exposure experiences. Providing rewards, both tangible and social, will help them to feel accomplishment and pride in taking on gradually more difficult challenges. Learning coping strategies that help them to relax and de-stress can reduce overall anxious tendencies, making success more likely.

This book can help you guide your child through the process of overcoming a phobia in a gentle but systematic way. Remember to take it slowly. Work through a chapter or two at a time and encourage your child to do the exercises provided. If your child is hesitant about facing fears, help them to choose experiences to start



with that are not very threatening. As they progress, you will both be surprised that challenges that at first seemed insurmountable will diminish in intensity. And, learning to overcome their fears can result in more freedom to engage in activities and with others with greater self-assurance. Watch your child soar to new heights of confidence!

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CHAPTER ONE

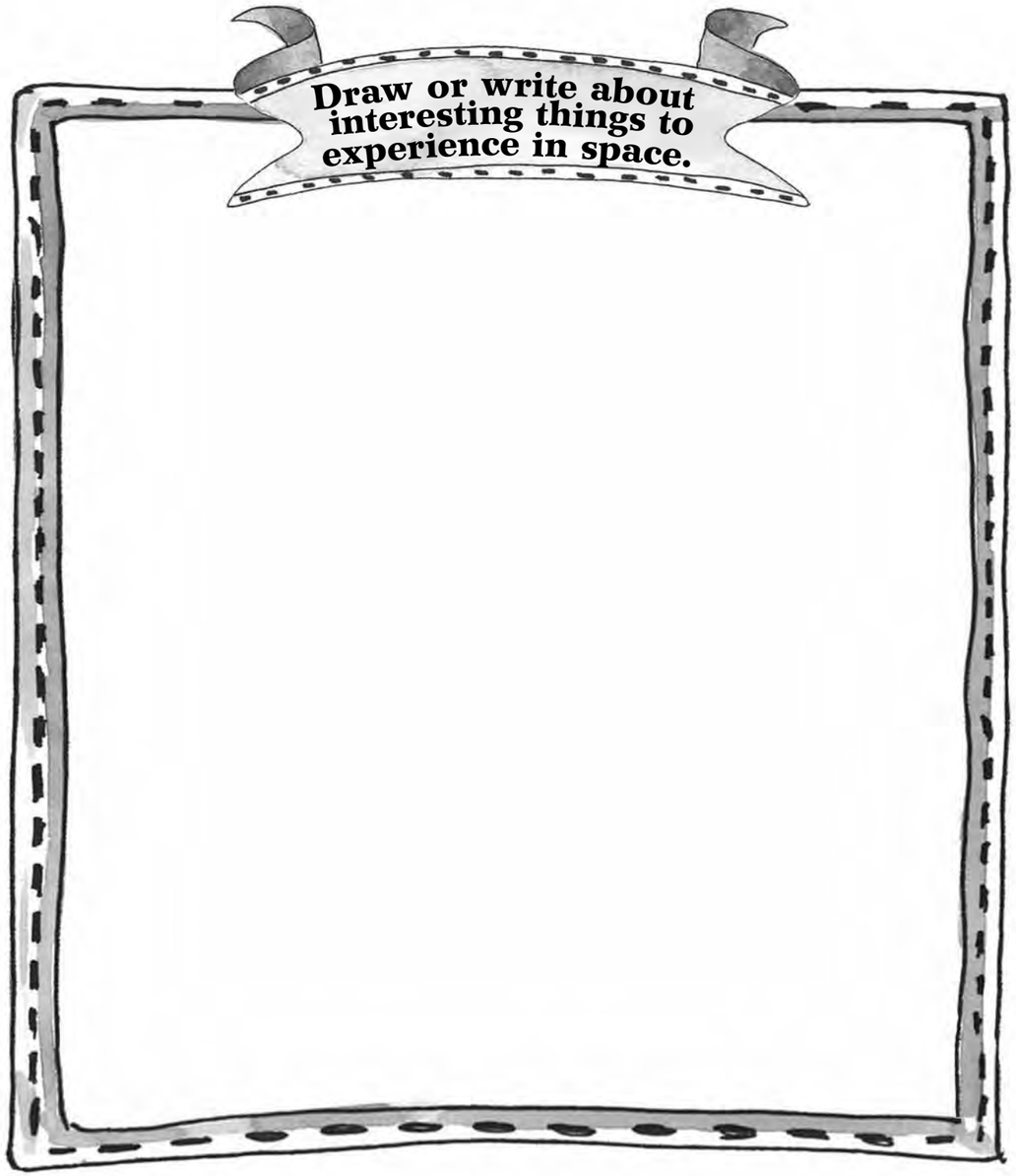
Emergencies and False Alarms

Astronauts fly to outer space. They have many different jobs. Some fly the spacecraft. Some orbit the earth or work in a space station or walk on the moon. They might bring supplies to the space station or do science experiments. If they leave their shuttle or space station, they wear special space suits because there is no air in space. When they are in the space station, they float because there is no gravity to keep them on the floor. Astronauts train for years to do their jobs well. There is also a huge team of people on Earth who use computers to help guide their work and keep them safe.



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Imagine going into space! What is it like to be weightless and float through the air? What parts of space would you want to explore?

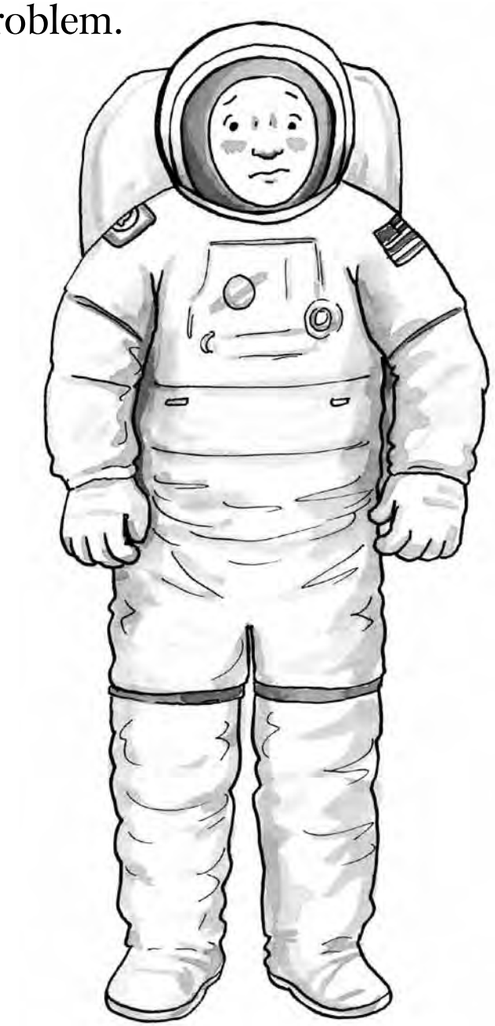


One of the reasons that astronauts spend so much time preparing for space travel is that they have to be ready for anything. Space travel is very complicated and emergencies are possible. A space shuttle has all kinds of alarms and flashing lights to alert the crew to any problem that needs attention right away. Astronauts are generally very brave, but if something goes wrong, it can feel quite scary.



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Our bodies also send out alarm signals when something happens that could be a problem. What are the signals in our bodies that tell us there's something scary going on? When astronauts face emergencies, their hearts may race. Their faces may get red and their breathing may speed up. They are super focused and working with the team to solve the problem.



thinking what to do

face red

heart racing

breathing fast

In an emergency, you would probably respond in a similar way: Your heart may beat faster, you might feel out of breath, and your body may shake. You may feel afraid. It is actually helpful to feel afraid in an emergency. These reactions tell you that you need to take action to avoid danger.

Circle what you feel when you are afraid.

face red

heart racing

stomach ache

sweaty skin

shaky legs



thinking what to do

dry mouth

breathing fast

other:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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All kids have fears. It's normal to be afraid, not just in an emergency, but sometimes in everyday life. There are plenty of scary things and scary places. For example, a very loud noise will probably make you jump and feel afraid. Your body is telling you: "Find out what that is! Make sure you're safe!" With everyday fears, we become afraid and then, when we see we're safe, we're over it.

But sometimes kids keep feeling as if there is an emergency when there isn't one. Your body and mind can fool you. Your heart may race or your face may get red or you may start breathing fast. Even though there is not an actual emergency, there is something you are afraid of**...very afraid of...WAY TOO AFRAID OF.** It is important to pay attention to the differences between real emergencies and **false alarms.**

If an alarm on the space station is signaling that the heat shield has been damaged, an astronaut needs to act quickly and alert everyone to begin an emergency response. His ship and those aboard may be in great danger. But it would be a problem if he reacted in the same way to an alarm that was reminding him to water the plants in an onboard science experiment! He might act in a way that is too extreme for the situation.

It's important that an astronaut be able to tell the difference between a real emergency and something that's an everyday experience.



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What-to-Do Guides for Kids®

Children's / Emotions
Ages 6–12

What to Do When Fear Interferes

A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Phobias

Astronauts blast off to explore places no one has ever been before! But outer space can be scary! Before they can blast off, astronauts first have to learn how to tell the difference between real emergencies and false alarms.



Lots of kids are a little afraid of some things, like heights or spiders. But some kids are so afraid that it stops them from having fun. Does this sound like you? If your fear is getting in the way of everyday activities, this book is for you!

What to Do When Fear Interferes guides children and their parents through overcoming phobias using strategies and techniques based on cognitive-behavioral principles. This interactive self-help book is the complete resource for educating, motivating, and empowering children to overcome their fears—so they can blast off to new adventures!

What-to-Do Guides for Kids®
Helping Kids Live Happier Lives

What to Do When Fear Interferes is part of Magination Press's award-winning What-to-Do Guides for Kids® series that includes



What to Do When You Worry Too Much:
A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety



What to Do When Mistakes Make You Quake:
A Kid's Guide to Accepting Imperfection

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