

You Decide Books™

Fears

Why Be Afraid?



By Lawrence E. Shapiro Ph.D.

You Decide Books™

Why Be Afraid?

By Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D.

ChildsworTMk
ChildsPLAY

CALL 1 • 800 • 962 • 1141

A Brand of The Guidance Group

www.guidance-group.com

Why Be Afraid?

By Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D.

Childswork/Childsplay publishes products for mental health professionals, teachers, and parents who wish to help children with their developmental, social, and emotional growth. For questions and comments, call 1-800-962-1141.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher.

© 2006 Childswork/Childsplay
A Brand of The Guidance Group
www.guidance-group.com


All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 10: 1-58815-072-0
ISBN 13: 978-1-58815-072-1

Before You Begin Reading

With most books, you begin at the first page and read each page until you reach the end of the story. *You Decide Books* are different! Instead of reading one story straight through, you'll make decisions that affect the direction the story takes. After reading each page, you'll either choose what the main character should do or be directed to turn to another page.

You Decide Books can be read many times, with the story taking a different direction each time based on the choices YOU make. Think about the consequences of each decision and then turn the page to see what happens!



On Friday morning, Sasha woke up with a stomachache. She knew she wasn't sick; she was worrying about the piano recital she would have to give that evening.

*If you think Sasha should stay in bed and keep worrying, turn to **page 2**.*

*If you think Sasha should get out of bed and complain to her mother, turn to **page 3**.*

*If you think Sasha should try talking positively to herself, turn to **page 4**.*

2

Sasha decided to stay in bed. She started to think about all the bad things that could happen. What if she made a mistake? What if the kids laughed at her? What if she forgot the music? What if she got so scared she threw up in front of everyone? Her stomach started to hurt more, and she felt like crying.

Turn to page 5.

Sasha jumped out of bed and went downstairs to find her mom.

“Good morning, honey,” said her mom.

“I don’t want to go to school today,” said Sasha.

“But today’s the day of your recital.”

“I know, but I can’t do it. I feel sick.”

“I think you’re nervous, not sick. Just go to school, Sasha, and you’ll start to feel better soon.”

4

Sasha decided to try talking to herself about her fear. She looked at herself in the mirror and said, “Today will be fine. I’m ready for the recital. I’m not going to make any mistakes, and even if I did it wouldn’t be a big deal. I’m going to try to have fun.”

To her surprise, she felt a little better. The pains in her stomach weren’t quite as bad, but she still didn’t feel her best.

“Mom, can I please stay home today?” Sasha asked. “My stomach really hurts.”

“No, sweetie. I know you’re worried about your recital, but you can’t avoid something just because you’re afraid of it.”

*If you think Sasha should beg her mother to let her stay home, turn to **page 6**.*

*If you think Sasha should reluctantly go to school, turn to **page 7**.*

*If you think Sasha should accept her mother’s explanation and try to stay calm, turn to **page 8**.*

6

“Please, Mom, please don’t make me go!” cried Sasha. “I can’t go, I can’t!”

“Yes, you can. That’s why I want you to go—to prove to yourself that you can. You’ll find out that it wasn’t so bad and next time you won’t be as scared.”

Turn to page 9.

“Okay, Mom.”

Sasha packed her book bag, even though she didn’t really want to. She could always go to the nurse once she got to school, she told herself.

Turn to page 9.

8

Sasha thought about what her mother was saying. It did make sense. She decided to accept her mother's explanation. As she packed her book bag, she repeated to herself, "I will try to keep calm. I will try to keep calm."

Turn to page 9.

Sasha's mom poured her a bowl of her favorite cereal and put it in front of her. But Sasha didn't feel like she could eat anything.

"I'm not hungry, Mom."

"Just try to eat a little. You need food to have energy to get through the day."

"I don't know," said Sasha. She picked at her cereal with her fingers and put a small piece in her mouth.

*If you think Sasha should continue to worry about the recital, turn to **page 10**.*

*If you think Sasha should remind herself that her fears are not likely to come true, turn to **page 11**.*

*If you think Sasha should talk to her mother about her fears, turn to **page 12**.*

10

Sasha almost spit out the cereal. She couldn't stop thinking of everything that could go wrong. What if she fell onstage? Even worse, what if she fell off the stage? What if everyone laughed at her? What if her piano teacher got mad at her for messing up?

Turn to page 13.



“Maybe everything will be fine,” she thought. “I’ve been practicing really hard, and I know the piece very well. And my worries about falling or people laughing are kind of silly.”

In her heart, she didn’t totally believe the things she was saying. But in her mind, she knew they made sense, and saying them out loud did help a little.

Turn to page 13.

12

“Mom, I’m just so scared.”

“What are you scared of?”

“I don’t even know anymore. I just feel like the whole thing will be a disaster.”

“Well, you might feel that way, but let’s think about the facts. The fact is, you have worked really hard, and you know your music very well. So even if you feel scared, that doesn’t mean things will turn out the way you worry they will.”

“I guess you’re right,” said Sasha. “I guess I wasn’t seeing things that way. Thanks for talking with me, Mom.”

“Anytime,” said her mom. “Now get to school!”

Feeling better, Sasha grabbed her book bag and walked to the bus stop.

On the bus ride, Sasha started to feel scared again. Her stomachache came back, this time even worse than before. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest. Her heartbeat got faster and faster.

*If you think Sasha should go to the nurse's office, turn to **page 14**.*

*If you think Sasha should try to deal with feeling scared, turn to **page 15**.*

*If you think Sasha should try a breathing exercise, turn to **page 16**.*

14

Sasha kept feeling worse. Her heart was racing, and she started to sweat. She felt terrible. When the bus arrived at school, she could barely get up and walk. She thought she should head straight for the nurse's office.

Turn to page 17.

Sasha tried to calm herself. “I will not let this happen to me,” she thought. She reminded herself that she played the piano really well.

By the time the bus arrived at school, she was still pretty upset, but she did feel a tiny bit better.

16

Sasha remembered that her mother had told her to take ten deep breaths when she felt upset. Her mom had said doing that would help to relax her, so Sasha decided to try it.

She took her first breath and counted one. She took her second and counted two.

When she got to five, she was starting to feel a little better, and by the time she got to ten, she felt a lot better. She noticed that her heartbeat had slowed down and that she had stopped sweating.

Turn to page 17.

Sasha was sitting in class, and Mr. Green was calling on kids to answer questions. She hadn't been called on yet, and she worried that she might be next. Her mind started to race, thinking about all the bad things that could happen.

*If you think Sasha should keep worrying about being called on, turn to **page 18**.*

*If you think Sasha should try to hide in her seat so she won't be called on, turn to **page 19**.*

*If you think Sasha should remind herself not worry about things that might not happen, turn to **page 20**.*

18

Sasha couldn't stop worrying about the "what-ifs." What if I don't know the answer? What if Mr. Green thinks I didn't do my homework? What if everyone laughs at me? She was so busy worrying that she missed the entire lesson.

Turn to page 21.

Sasha tried to hide in her seat so that she wouldn't be called on. She slid down so far that her head was almost even with her desktop. She was really uncomfortable, and the other kids started to look at her.

“Sasha, are you okay?” asked Mr. Green.

Sasha was embarrassed to be singled out. “I’m okay,” she said.

“Well, then, you may as well answer the question I asked.”

Sasha had been so busy trying to hide she hadn't even heard the question!

“I will not worry about things that have not happened yet and might never happen,” Sasha told herself. Once she took a deep breath and tried to clear her mind, she was able to relax and enjoy the lesson.

As it turned out, Mr. Green did not call on her, even though she knew the answer to every question he had asked.

Sasha was happy she had not wasted time worrying for nothing.

Later that day, Sasha began to worry that everyone had noticed her strange behavior.

“They must think I’m so weird,” she worried. “I can tell they’re all thinking about me.”

*If you think Sasha should keep worrying about this, turn to **page 22**.*

*If you think Sasha should tell herself “so what?” turn to **page 23**.*

*If you think Sasha should try to stop worrying, turn to **page 24**.*

22

The more Sasha thought about it, the more she became convinced that all the kids were thinking about her.

“They’re all going to gossip about me at lunch,” she thought.

Her palms became sweaty, and her heart started to beat fast. She worried she was going to become sick again.

“This is the worst day of my life,” she said to herself.

Sasha thought that all the kids were thinking about how weird she was, but she tried not to care.

“So what if they think I’m weird?” she said to herself. “I’ll just try to ignore it.”

She felt a little better, and she was able to focus on her work instead of on what other people thought.

24

Sasha tried to talk to herself about her fears.

“How do I know what they’re thinking?” she asked herself. “I’m not a mind reader. For all I know, they’re all worrying about the same thing!”

This thought made her laugh, and she started to relax a little.

At lunchtime, Sasha was very quiet. She unwrapped her sandwich, took one bite, and put it down. She put a straw into her milk, but she didn't even take one sip. All the other kids at the table were talking and laughing, while Sasha just sat there with an unhappy frown.

Her friend Megan noticed and asked, "What's wrong, Sasha?"

*If you think Sasha should ignore her friend and keep thinking about her fears, turn to **page 26**.*

*If you think Sasha should tell her friend everyone hates her, turn to **page 27**.*

*If you think Sasha should share her fears calmly, turn to **page 28**.*

26

Sasha just ignored Megan. She was afraid that if she opened her mouth she might say something stupid. She might even throw up!

“Fine, be rude,” Megan said. She got up and switched seats.

Sasha felt bad about being rude to Megan, but she wasn’t ready to apologize or explain herself.

“Everyone hates me,” Sasha complained

“Why do you say that?” asked Megan. “No one hates you.”

“They’re all staring at me. They think I’m weird.”

Megan looked around and didn’t see anyone staring at Sasha.

“They’re all thinking how stupid I am,” Sasha went on.

“I don’t see anyone looking at you,” said Megan. “And how do you know what they’re thinking?”

“I don’t know,” said Sasha. “Sometimes I get worried that everyone’s thinking bad things about me.”

“That’s silly,” said Megan. “You can’t tell what they’re thinking. You’re not a mind reader.”

That made Sasha laugh. “You’re right. I shouldn’t worry about what I don’t even know.”

“That’s right,” said Megan. “Everyone feels worried sometimes, but those feelings don’t mean that what you’re worried about will happen.”

“Yeah,” said Sasha, “that makes sense.”

She started to relax and feel better. She was glad she had shared her feelings with her friend. Megan didn’t think she was weird at all!

Finally the schoolday was over, and Sasha rode the bus home. She had a few hours to practice before her recital, and she thought she would feel better if she practiced as much as she possibly could.

“I can still learn to play it better in a few hours,” she thought. “I’ll just work extra hard.”

But when she got home and sat in front of the piano, she felt really nervous. She started to play and found herself making mistakes even on the easy parts, mistakes she had never made before.

“Oh no!” she thought. “This is going to be terrible. I’m even worse than I thought!”

*If you think Sasha should start to panic, turn to **page 30**.*

*If you think Sasha should accept the fact that she might make some mistakes, turn to **page 31**.*

*If you think Sasha should remind herself that she knows the piece really well, turn to **page 32**.*

“There’s no way I can do this tonight,” she thought. “This whole day has been so hard, and I’m just too tired to play. I’ll probably get sick. Maybe I’ll pass out during the performance and hurt myself! Or what if I forget all the notes and embarrass my mother?”

Sasha’s thoughts were so jumbled that she started to get a headache.

“Well, maybe I will make some errors tonight,” Sasha thought. “I may as well just accept it. If I make errors, it’s not the end of the world, right? I can always start over.”

This made Sasha feel a little better, but not quite enough. She still had a bad stomachache. She didn’t love the idea of making mistakes in front of other people.

32

“Just because I goofed up now doesn’t mean I’ll make mistakes later,” she thought. “I know this piece. I’ve been working on it for three months, and I can play it with my eyes closed. The only thing getting in the way of my playing perfectly is my own worrying,” she told herself.

Part of her knew that what she was saying was true, and she started to feel a lot better.

As she pulled on her recital dress, Sasha heard her mother calling her from downstairs. “Time to go, Sasha.”

All of a sudden, her panic came back. She didn’t answer.

Her mother ran upstairs to see what was wrong.

When she saw her mother, Sasha burst into tears. “I can’t go, Mom! It’s too scary. It’s going to be awful, I can just tell.” She collapsed on the floor and pulled her knees to her chest.

*If you think Sasha should ask to stay home, turn to **page 34**.*

*If you think Sasha should just go to the concert, turn to **page 35**.*

*If you think Sasha should try some calming exercises, turn to **page 36**.*

34

Sasha felt like her arms and legs weren't working anymore. She thought there was no way she could get up off the floor. She was crying too hard, and she felt like she couldn't breathe.

"Please, please, let me stay home," she begged.

"Sasha, please get up," her mom said. "This isn't helping."

Sasha decided to try going to the recital, even though she felt awful. She dried her tears with the back of her hand and wiped her nose with a tissue. Her mom brought her a glass of water, and she drank it all. She still felt pretty sick.

“Feeling better?” asked her mom.

“No,” said Sasha, “but I’ll go anyway.”

Sasha decided to try calming herself. She asked her mom for a glass of water. When her mom came back with the water, she sat up and drank some. It made her feel a lot better.

“Feeling better?” asked her mom.

“Yeah,” said Sasha.

She reminded herself of what she had said many times throughout the day: she had practiced, and she wasn’t going to fail. She reminded herself that just because she felt bad didn’t mean things really were bad.

“Okay, let’s go,” said Sasha.

“Really?”

“I’m ready,” said Sasha, with a smile.

Sasha and her mom walked through the double doors into the recital hall. It was bigger than she had expected. There were at least one hundred seats! It looked really fancy, and everyone was dressed up. There were so many people.

She started to feel sick again.

*If you think Sasha should keep feeling sick, turn to **page 38**.*

*If you think Sasha should ignore her feeling of sickness, turn to **page 39**.*

*If you think Sasha should try to talk to herself about feeling sick, turn to **page 40**.*

38

“I think I’m going to throw up,” Sasha thought. She dropped her mom’s hand and ran to the bathroom. She sat in a stall, her head down.

After a few minutes, her mother came and found her.

“Are you okay?”

“No,” said Sasha.

“Everything will be fine,” her mother reminded her.

“I’m too sick to play.”

“Just come out and talk to me.”

Sasha came out of the stall and looked at herself in the mirror. Her face was ghost-white.

Sasha and her mother found their seats, and Sasha waited in dread for her name to be called.

“Mom, I’m trying to ignore how much my stomach hurts, but it’s really hard to do.”

Her mom took Sasha’s hand and gave it an encouraging squeeze.

Sasha had a sudden thought and whispered to her mom, “Well, pretty soon my part will be over, and I bet my stomach will feel better then.”

Her mom nodded and squeezed Sasha’s hand again.

40

Sasha remembered how she had felt this morning. Her stomach had hurt then too, but she hadn't been really sick, just nervous.

“Sometimes, being nervous feels like being sick, but it’s just my muscles being tense,” she thought. She tried to take deep breaths, and her stomach started to relax a little. She thought she could make it through the performance after all.

Turn to page 41.

Finally, it was the moment she had been waiting for all day. Sasha heard her piano teacher, Mrs. Mandell, call her name, and she walked slowly to the stage. Once on stage, she pulled out the piano bench. It made a loud noise dragging on the floor, and Sasha cringed. She sat down, put her hands on the keys, and froze.

*If you think Sasha should leave the stage, turn to **page 42**.*

*If you think Sasha should force herself to stay, turn to **page 43**.*

*If you think Sasha should relax and take her time, turn to **page 44**.*

42

Sasha couldn't look at the audience, and she couldn't start playing. She jumped up and ran backstage. She sat there shaking until her mom came back and found her.

"I couldn't do it, Mom."

"That's okay, sweetie."

"I'm sorry."

Mrs. Mandell walked up to them. She said, "Sasha, you can still play if you want to. I can put you on last. Lots of kids get nervous, so I often do this."

Sasha agreed to play last. She got through the whole piece, but she didn't stop worrying until the final note.

Sasha hummed the first few notes in her head and then started to play. About halfway through the piece, she made a mistake but she didn't stop playing. She just went on like nothing had happened.

When she got to the end, she stood up and took a bow. Then she looked out at the audience for the first time. They were all smiling and clapping. No one seemed to have noticed her mistake.

44

Sasha took a few deep breaths. She let herself take as much time as she needed before starting to play. At first, she played slowly and quietly. As she relaxed, she played better and better, and the piece was over before she knew it.

When she finished, she felt so relieved. It was a great feeling. The only thing better was seeing the audience clapping and smiling and knowing her mom was out there, proud of her.

Sasha and her mother drove home in the car.

“So do you think you’d like to do another recital?” her mother asked.

“I don’t know, Mom. Today was really hard for me.”

As she lay in bed that night, Sasha thought about her mom’s question.

*If you think Sasha should avoid doing another recital, turn to **page 46**.*

*If you think Sasha should say yes but have mixed feelings about it, turn to **page 47**.*

*If you think Sasha should agree and feel confident, turn to **page 48**.*

46

“I’ll never do another recital,” Sasha said to herself. “I felt sick the whole day, and I messed up just like I thought I would. I don’t ever want to go through that again, as long as I live.”

The End

Sasha didn't love the idea of doing another recital, but she thought maybe next time she could do better. She had learned a lot from her day of feeling scared, and she could use what she had learned the next time she had to play. And what's more, she had survived the day.

The End

48

Sasha knew she would play another recital. She had overcome her fears every step of the way, and she had learned a lot from doing so. The most important lesson of all was that feeling afraid did not mean something would go wrong. It was just fear, and that was something she could handle.

And she had loved it when everyone clapped for her!

The End

You Decide Books™

Why Be Afraid?

Sasha is afraid of many things, particularly speaking or performing in front of others. As she tries to prepare for her piano recital, she must make decisions about giving in to her fears or coping with them. Will she be able to give a performance without throwing up? Will she overcome her fears of speaking up in class? You decide!

Childhood fears and worries are often very troublesome, but they can be overcome. Sasha faces twelve critical decisions about whether to give in to her fears or deal with them. Some decisions make her feel even worse, while others make her proud of her accomplishments.

You Decide Books are designed to teach children to think about the consequences of their choices and encourage them to make positive decisions. Each book in the series has a companion emotional-intelligence workbook.

About the Author: Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D. has written extensively on teaching children about emotional intelligence. He has appeared on many national television and radio shows as a parenting expert.

ChildsworTMk
ChildsPLAY
CALL 1 • 800 • 962 • 1141

A Brand of The Guidance Group
www.guidance-group.com

ISBN 978-1-58815-072-1

