

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

In this month's column, Pastor Mike Novotny shares some thoughts on dealing with anxiety. They're helpful for both kids and adults. Of course, if you or your child is struggling with severe anxiety, please contact a mental health professional.

—Nicole Balza

HOW CAN CHRISTIANS COMBAT ANXIETY?

DO YOU OR YOUR CHILD often feel anxious? Overwhelmed by worst-case scenarios, no matter how unlikely they might be? Physically sick because you are emotionally stuck on a negative thought?

Recently, I reached out to a Christian counselor for some advice. While I personally haven't struggled with crippling anxiety (yet), I know and love many people who do.

The counselor replied with a link to a kid's workbook published by the American Psychological Association entitled *What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety*. Here are three tips that I learned, which I want to pass on to you:

1. If you're worried sick, call for help—On one page, the author asks kids to mark the spots on an outlined body that hurt when they are worried. She went on to explain that worry can make your head hurt, your stomach ache, and your body sweat. Often our physical hurts are connected to our mental health.

The healing solution? Call for help! When a worry crosses your mind, verbalize it to another person. Set a time each day or week to express all your worries to a loved one. Like mold, worries grow in the darkness, so get them out of your head and bring them into the light.

James' words come to mind: "Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:14-16).

Jesus' brother knew of the connection between healing and confession. Sometimes (but not always) sickness is connected to sin. Unconfessed worries—which are, in essence, believing that the devil has kicked God off his throne—can mess with more than your mind. So call up the church, confess your sins, and pray for God to do something powerful.

That just might be the step that heals you.

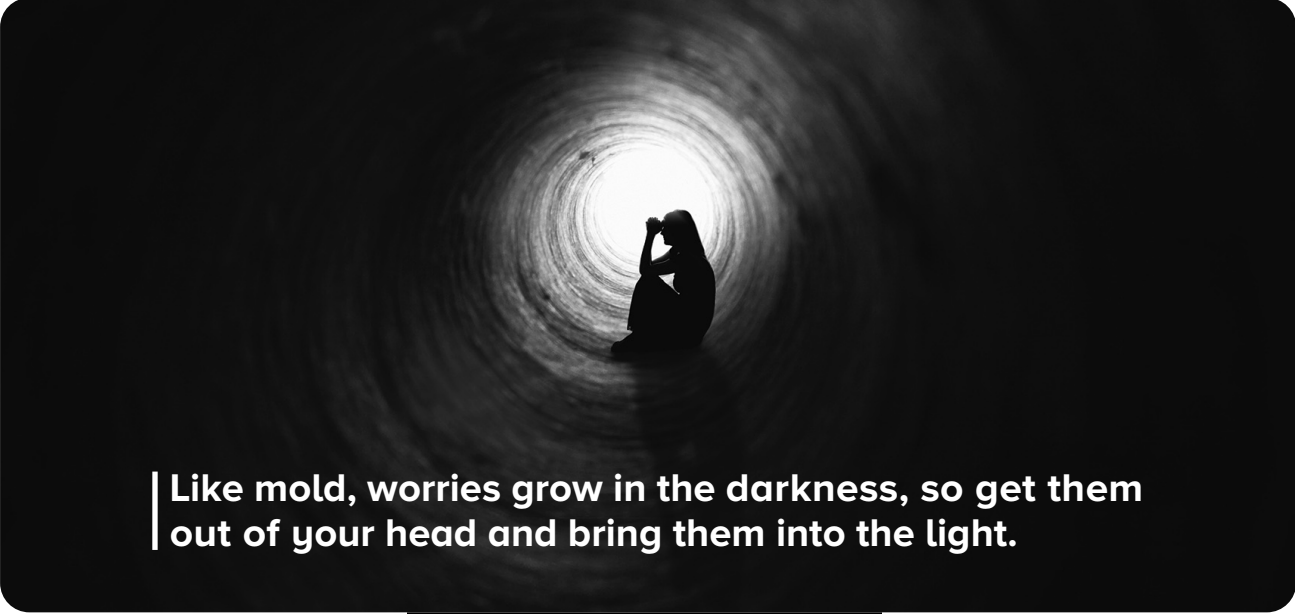
2. Identify the lies—On one memorable page, the author asks kids to draw "Worry Monsters," ugly little creatures that crawl up on our shoulders and whisper worries into our ears. Worry Monsters love to assume that we're going to beat the lottery-like odds and end up crashing into every possible tragedy.

Remember what Jesus said about our spiritual enemy, the devil? "When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). The real Worry Monster is not some ugly, shoulder-sitting creature but that fallen angel who rages against Jesus, the Truth, by peddling half-truths and outright lies.

The solution? Call him what he is—a liar! In the book, the author lets kids fill in speech bubbles with the things they plan to say to their Worry Monsters. We Christians can do the same. "Satan, you lie. My Father said nothing can separate me from his love." "Devil, you don't know what you're talking about. My Jesus promised he will never leave me or forsake me." "You liar! The Bible guarantees my God is working everything out for my good."

One little word can fell him. So, use that little word—*liar!*

3. Think good (and unrelated) thoughts—Where logic might fail, distraction might not. So think about



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something else, however unrelated those thoughts might be. In the children's book, the author leaves a blank page for kids to draw one of their favorite memories in vivid detail. As kids recall the sights and sounds of their happy moment, their Worry Monsters fade into fuzzy, distant thoughts.

That tip reminded me of something a counselor told me as I was battling a personal struggle years ago. "Mike, the human brain can't focus on two things at the same time." When I kept trying to tell myself, "Don't do it! Don't do it!" he suggested that I needed to stop thinking about "it" altogether. Think about

something else, and you might forget what is so tempting about "it" in the first place.

Sounds a lot like the apostle Paul. In his famous chapter on replacing anxiety with peace, Paul writes, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. . . . Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:6-8).

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Christian Family Solutions, a WELS-affiliated ministry that offers counseling care and services, provides articles and resources for dealing with anxiety and other mental health issues at christianfamilysolutions.org. One new resource is a free weekly e-mail titled "Mental Health Moments" that offers tips for healthy hearts and minds. Visit the website to subscribe.

Think! One of Paul's greatest weapons was to think about such things. In particular, Paul loved to think about the true, noble, and praiseworthy presence of God.

Maybe we could do the same. On days when our hearts are feeling illogical, let's turn our attention to "such things" of the Bible: the nobleness of God's character and the worthiness of Jesus. We can run through every passage we've learned about God and every promise we've received from God.

Once we fix our eyes on the object of our faith, Jesus, we might find ourselves forgetting

what we were anxious about in the first place.

No, this won't be the end of our war for peaceful hearts. But God's Word is a powerful weapon against worry!

The information in this article originally appeared as two blogs for Time of Grace, timeofgrace.org.



Mike Novotny is pastor at St. Peter–The CORE, Appleton, Wisconsin, and also serves as host of Time of Grace's television program. He and his wife, Kim, have two daughters.

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