



PINK SHIRT DAY
FRIDAY 16 OCT 2020

From Worrier to Warrior A guide to conquering your fears

Dan Peters (2013). Great Potential Press, US

To save you time reading all the way through this review, let me just sum up at the beginning by saying I really, really liked this book and recommend it for professionals, parents and kids. In fact, I'll be buying several copies and handing them out wildly!

While the book is probably aimed at, I'd say, around 8 to 14-year-olds, the explanations and strategies will be useful for kids from around six years old to anyone in adulthood. I do believe this book has what it takes to turn worriers into warriors and the writer deserves a big high five or fist bump!

So why am I such a fan? From the outset, the tone of the book is super friendly – it's easy to read, relatable and made me feel supported. The writer, Dr Dan Peters, tells us about his anxiety, he is deeply empathetic and his experience helps to normalise anxiety. It's a relief to hear others describe their worries when you yourself are a worrier – soon to become warrior.

Easy to digest

Peters leaves no leaf unturned in explaining absolutely everything! But in an easily digestible way – there's no clinical or academic presence, though of course the foundations certainly are. Peters begins at the biological goings-on moving through to the ways and reasons we worry. It's very comprehensive but the option is left open to read the lot, or you determine the parts which pertain to you and your kids. He recommends that children get themselves a support team, and as a parent, that will mean you – so I'd suggest you read it with your child, before your child or being available for your child who is reading it.

I also love the externalisation of anxiety using the Worry Monster – not dissimilar to our very own Kotuku Creative Worry Bug. Externalisation helps kids feel like the problem isn't "them", it's this "thing" that they can learn about, understand more completely, begin to and then fully manage. The idea Peters gives, that the Worry Monster is a bully, is a great message to start from and work with. However, this might be the clue for older children that this book is for a younger audience, so be clear that this is an "idea" that may be useful for your older child, but all the other strategies are the same for any person (child or adult) wanting to overcome anxiety and, importantly, they work.

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Creating a plan

I know I'm near raving, but the book just gets better! Peters extensively explains the effects of worry, especially on behaviour. Many children who worry will avoid situations as a means to cope, but he explains why this isn't such a great strategy and fully details creating a plan to tackle the Worry Monster, so he won't stop us doing things or going places. I love that these plans start with something a child knows they can manage, then they move their way up to more challenging tasks or situations. It's a gentle, reassuring approach.

I have recommended this book so many times since reading it. If you're a worrier, your child is a worrier, this book can certainly help. Warriors we are!

Reviewed by Anna Mowat, who works predominantly as part of the All Right? Wellbeing campaign in Otautahi, where she is based. She also delivers Incredible Years parenting courses for the Ministry of Education and is currently working on a Cure Kids research project to create support for parents whose children have emotional regulation issues.

The Mental Health Foundation's Information Service brings you reviews this Pink Shirt Day on books with bullying prevention themes.

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