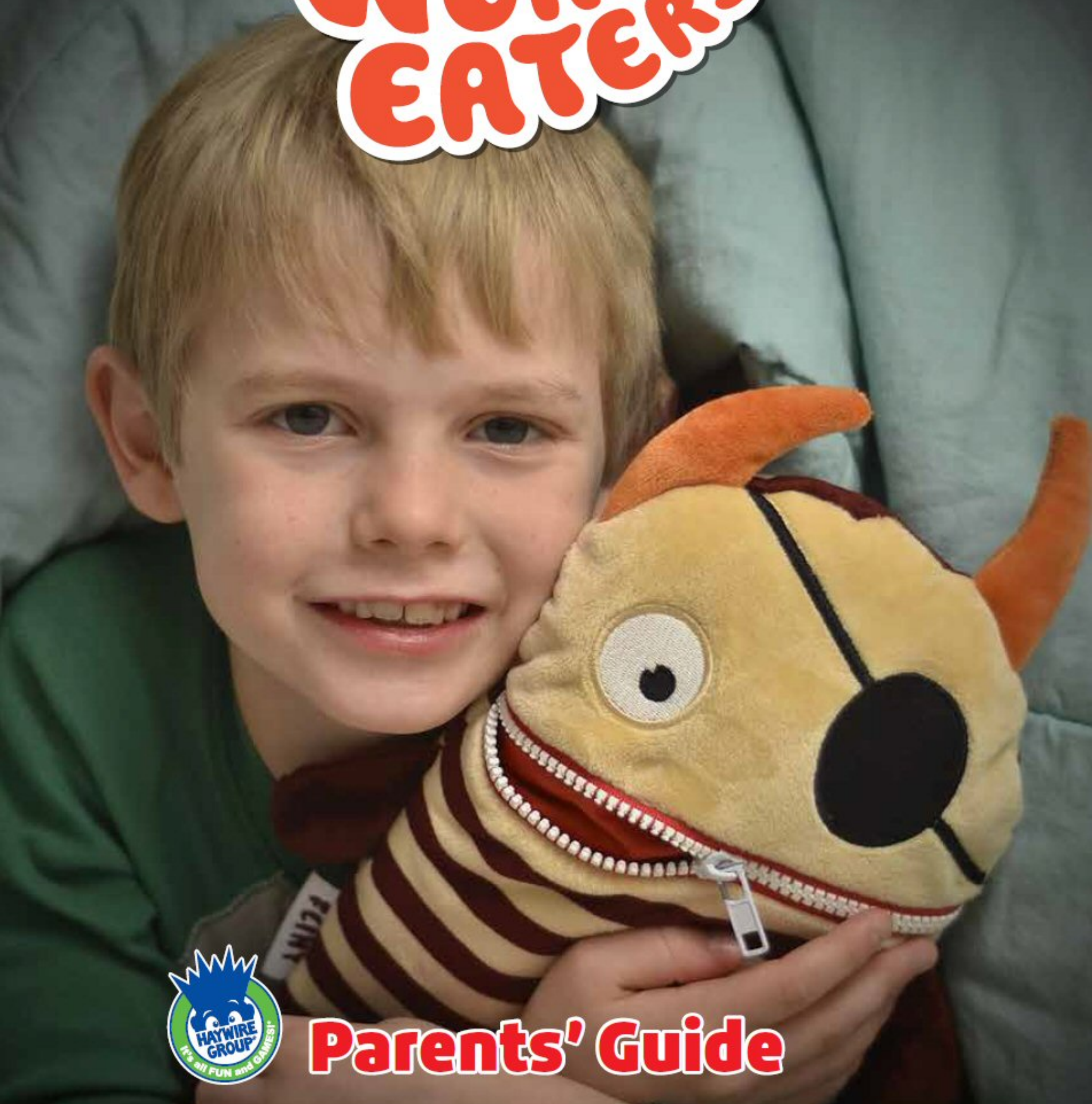


GERD HAHN'S

# WORRY EATERS®



## Parents' Guide

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## **Hi Parents!**

The award-winning Haywire Group has a long history of developing creative products and materials that bring children and families together. Showing their ongoing and continued commitment to improving the lives of children, Haywire Group presents the lovable, plush Worry Eaters - giving children and families a playful approach to facing normal childhood worries. They know that children's worries, however big or small, are all very real!

This book is designed to help parents use Worry Eaters with their children in many fun and effective ways. Worry Eaters offer children an opportunity to express themselves and their worries, and offer parents an opportunity to learn about their children's worries in a safe and playful way.

# “Let me carry your worries so you don’t have to.”

How it works:

Write down your worries and fears

Feed them to me - I’ll hold them for you

We’ll get through this together!



## **WORRIES are a PART OF LIFE:**

At times, childhood worries can be very BIG, and at other times, very small. No matter how big or small the worries, they are all important in the life of a child.

Worries and fears have function. They keep us safe. They often help kids perform better at school, on tests, in sports and while doing activities by fueling hard work. Children’s worries are different than the daily worries of adults, like paying bills, managing the household, and work deadlines, but just like adults, they have their share of daily demands and expectations as well as many new experiences they will regularly face as a growing child. Naturally, kids can get stressed and worried.

Parents can help kids learn to manage stress and tackle everyday problems with ease using Worry Eaters as a tool to identify worries, clarify misunderstandings or misconceptions, resolve conflicts and build self esteem. while promoting the development of healthy coping skills. Kids who can do this develop a sense of confidence and optimism that will help them master life’s challenges, big and small.

## **WHAT WORRIES?**

What kids worry about is often related to their age and stage of development. Worries are also a sign of an active imagination, and the creative and magical thinking that is the hallmark of childhood. Talking about worries can be difficult for kids, so allowing flexibility through writing or drawing can be extremely helpful in opening up discussions about worries for the first time. The Worry Eaters fit perfectly into that place between reality and fantasy by helping children cope with everyday worries in an extraordinary way.

All children are individuals. Kids grow and develop at their own natural pace. When considering developmental milestones, behaviors and skills that children naturally acquire as they grow, it is important to remember that each child reaches these in his or her own time.

Here are some common worries at different ages and stages of development:

## **Toddlers: 2-3 years of age**

Toddlers are at a stage of development with rapid growth, and need plenty of stimulation and loving attention. Despite rapid progress in learning to think, toddlers still have a limited understanding of their world, and need familiar routines to be and feel successful.

Separation from parents or primary caregivers (even when brief)

Disruption in daily routines

New people or places

Difficulty with a new task – like learning to use the toilet, or sleeping in a bed rather than a crib.

Too much change all at once – new home, new daycare, new baby in the family

## **Preschoolers: 3-5 years of age**

Preschool-age children are experiencing great intellectual, physical and emotional growth. During this stage of development, they are working towards independence, while remaining centered on themselves and their needs. Because they understand relationships in self-centered terms, preschoolers may feel that they are the cause of certain events. Preschoolers may also find it hard to tell the difference between what is real and what is imaginary.

Fantasy-based worries such as monsters under the bed

Disappointing a parent or teacher

Uncontrollable emotions – they are just learning about all their feelings

Difficulty communicating – they are still learning to express themselves

Lack of success when trying a new activity, like a sport, game or puzzle

# School-age and pre-teens:

## 5-8 years of age, up to 12 years

School-age and pre-teen children are forming friendships and relationships outside the family, but the family remains the central part of their lives. Children at this stage of development are learning to form complex thoughts. This results in having the ability to imagine other future realities and in becoming concerned about their own self-image and what others might think of them and their family. It is particularly important for school-age and pre-teen children to have opportunities to talk about their feelings.

Being unsuccessful at school – grades and tests

Being unsuccessful at sports or extracurricular activities – whether they will make the team, if they missed a goal, or will get a part in the play

Changing bodies

Fitting in with friends

Bullying /fighting with friends

Pre-teens are also beginning to feel a part of the larger world around them and are gaining greater awareness about world events and issues they hear about on the news or at school.

Terrorism

Pollution

War

Global warming

Endangered animals

Natural disasters



## **How to Use Worry Eaters with your Child: there are many ways!**

Each family is different, and you as a parent know your child best – between you and your child you can determine if the worries placed inside their Worry Eater are for sharing with you, or if they would like to keep these worries between themselves and their Worry Eater.

Each Worry Eater's adorable zipper mouth provides children with a safe place to share worries. Children are invited to write or draw their worries and place them in the Worry Eater's mouth, so that the Worry Eater can hold onto them. For very young children, parents may need to help with writing or drawing the worry.

As a parent participating in this process, you can emphasize ideas, but try not to make too many suggestions. Trust your child to make decisions about what to draw or write. Sometimes, especially in the beginning, it may take kids some time to articulate their worries. This is all right. For many children this is just the beginning of identifying what is on their minds, and what might be causing them to worry.

Worry Eaters allow children a chance to identify worries and separate themselves from that worry or problem, giving the child some time to "take a break" from carrying the weight of that worry. This separation, giving the worry to the Worry Eater, allows children the opportunity to look at the worry or problem separate from themselves. The act of then sharing that worry inside the Worry Eater's mouth with a parent, caregiver or trusted friend can help a child problem solve solutions, face that worry, and/or just acknowledge that the worry exists.

"...and it helps to have an object sometimes, so kids might not want to tell about something that bothers them, but we can direct the conversation to the Worry Eater and take the pressure off the child."

-Sherry Artemenko, MA, CCC, SLP  
CEO/Founder of Play on Words

**Identifying worries** is the first step for your child and their Worry Eater. Once your child has shared their worries with their Worry Eater, it is important that you take your child's lead in what comes next.

Do they want to let the Worry Eater hold onto the worry for a while?

Does their Worry Eater holding onto that worry allow them to “take a break” from that worry? Or would they like to share their worry with you?

Are they ready to begin some discussion about that worry?

Can they talk about why they have that worry?

What do they think can be done to help them overcome that worry?

Working together with your child and their Worry Eater, you can begin some problem solving. This involves finding creative ways to change, modify or overcome these worries together.

Together you and your child can problem solve ways to change that worry. For example:

“I’m worried I will be left at school” could be changed to “My mom/dad/caregiver comes to get me each day after school – I have never been left at school”.

**Problem solving** can also include discussion about overcoming worries by learning more about what worries your child. For example:

“My friend didn’t invite me to his party” could actually be changed to, “His party is for family members only this year”, or “I have many other friends to spend time with”.

Developing different **coping strategies** can help a child build a personal collection of coping tools that can be added to their coping toolbox for life. Since worry is a part of life, you and your child can find ways to be and feel successful when experiencing worry.

Coping strategies can include simple actions like:

Taking a deep breath

Giving your Worry Eater a hug

Going for a walk together

Finding a positive distraction (read a book, draw a picture, play a game)



Saying some positive statements like “I can do this”, or “It’s just a worry. Worries are ok – I can manage this”

Or something else that helps your child relax



**Practice** helps children build healthy habits and behaviors to manage when faced with a worry. By using their Worry Eater regularly, each night before bed, or at a special time that works best for them, your child can develop confidence and feel capable when facing worries, both old and new. Through practice and repetition, routines are created that promote success and build self esteem.

## Extra help:

As parents, we work so hard to help our kids be and feel successful every day. This can be hard work! It is important that we accept and acknowledge when we are not able, or are not equipped, to help our kids with every situation – including facing worries. Please try to banish the myth of the perfect parent – you are doing a great job, and even though you try, you may not be able to do it all. So don’t hesitate to seek out help from others, starting with your family doctor or pediatrician, if you have any concerns about your ability to support your child and their worries. Your doctor will be able to discuss and collaborate with you the appropriate plan for you and your child and their individual needs.

Families facing major life changes, illness, trauma and loss: Worry Eaters can help!

Children and families grow and change every day, all while experiencing natural highs and lows. Major life changes such as divorce, a serious illness, a traumatic experience or significant loss can create tremendous stress and worry. Every child will experience these changes in different ways, with different feelings, and will need support to navigate and learn to cope. In some cases your family may want assistance from a wonderful team of helpers that might include doctors, nurses, social workers, child life specialists, psychologists or psychiatrists, to name a few.

Your child's Worry Eater can become a part of that team too! Invite your child to introduce their Worry Eater to the helpers. Worry Eaters can be a special tool to assist this team of helpers in learning more about your child's individual needs, and can be a great way to help your child initiate contact and connect with the team. Worry Eaters can also help children "share" important information about them, their feelings and worries about what is happening in their life. You may even discover that one of these helpers has their OWN Worry Eater!

"My Worry Eater takes away my bad dreams. I wish everyone had one in their house so he (the Worry Eater) can take away all their worries and their mommy's worries." -Cameron, age 3

"I like that you can open his mouth and he is nice and soft. I wish he was real! I like his zippered mouth." - Ben, age 4

## **Worry Eater Awards**

2016 Toy Of The Year Finalist -- Best Specialty Toy Of The Year

Parents Magazine Best Toys

Creative Child Awards Plush of the Year

The National Parenting Center's Seal of Approval

Mom's Choice Award - Gold

Mr. Dad's Seal of Approval

NAPPA Gold Award (National Parenting Publications Awards)

National Association of Gifted Children's Recommended Toy Seal

PAL Award

Dr. Toy 100 Best Picks

2015 Top Holiday Toys – The Toy Insider

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