

My ANXIETY IS MESSING THINGS UP

by JENNIFER LICATE

Illustrated by SUZANNE DEAKY



BOYS TOWN[®]
Press

Boys Town, Nebraska

My Anxiety Is Messing Things Up

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ISBN: 978-1-944882-89-1

Published by Boys Town Press, 13603 Flanagan Blvd., Boys Town, NE 68010

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Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Licate, Jennifer, author. | Beaky, Suzanne, 1971- illustrator.

Title: My anxiety is messing things up / by Jennifer Licate ; illustrated by Suzanne Beaky.

Description: Boys Town, NE : Boys Town Press, [2022] | Series: Navigating friendships. | Accompanied by: My Anxiety is Messing Things Up Teacher and Counselor Activity Guide. | Audience: Grades 4-8. | Summary: Oscar wants to excel at everything he does, from academics to music. But the pressure to be perfect comes at a price. Oscar is wracked with anxiety. He's so afraid of falling short of expectations and disappointing everyone, he can't sleep. Will joining a special club for kids with anxiety help him conquer his worries, or will the club just create more stress and sleepless nights? Part of the Navigating Friendship book series, this quick-read chapter book includes discussion questions and activities to encourage self-reflection and give readers a deeper understanding of how to manage anxiety.--Publisher.

Identifiers: ISBN: 978-1-944882-89-1 (book) | 978-1-944882-90-7 (Teacher guide)

Subjects: LCSH: Anxiety in children--Juvenile fiction. | Perfectionism (Personality trait)--Juvenile fiction. | Stress in children--Juvenile fiction. | Emotions in children--Juvenile fiction. | Friendship--Juvenile fiction. | Self-esteem in children--Juvenile fiction. | Self-reliance in children--Juvenile fiction. | Interpersonal relations in children--Juvenile fiction. | Children-- Life skills guides--Juvenile fiction. | CYAC: Anxiety--Fiction. | Perfectionism (Personality trait)--Fiction. | Stress--Fiction. | Emotions in children--Fiction. | Friendship--Fiction. | Emotions--Fiction. | Self-esteem--Fiction. | Self-reliance--Fiction. | Interpersonal relations-- Fiction. | Conduct of life--Fiction. | BISAC: JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Depression & Mental Illness. | JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Emotions & Feelings. | JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Friendship. | JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Self-Esteem & Self-Reliance. | EDUCATION / Counseling / Crisis Management. | EDUCATION / Counseling / General.

Classification: LCC: PZ7.1.L5297 M9 2022 | DDC: [Fic]--23

Printed in the United States

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Boys Town Press is the publishing division of Boys Town, a national organization serving children and families.



Chapter 1

I'M OSCAR. MOST PEOPLE THINK I HAVE A LOT GOING FOR ME. I get good grades. Last year, my friend and I even won second place in our school's science fair. I also play on my school's baseball team and in the school band. I know a lot of kids, am pretty well-liked by everyone, and have been friends with the same group of guys for years.

I try my best in everything I do, which makes me look like a really responsible kid. But what most people don't know is that I put a lot of pressure on myself to excel. Sometimes it stresses me out.



My parents also expect a lot from me. They don't think they do, but I feel the pressure. My older brother gets almost all A's in school. **SO, I FEEL LIKE I HAVE TO DO THE SAME.**

My parents say I'm a perfectionist. That basically means I try to do everything perfectly, which is impossible. I'm rarely satisfied with my best, and I'm always pushing myself to do things better.

I try not to be a perfectionist because it's too much pressure. I tell myself to just do the best I can. Sometimes that works. But mostly I feel the weight of all the expectations, pressure, and worry. Sometimes I think I feel fine when, suddenly, I notice I'm clenching my jaw or shoulders because I'm so anxious or trying to be perfect.

I usually can keep pretty calm during school because I'm busy and distracted. I'm most anxious when I try to go to sleep at night. My mind races with all the what ifs. What if I didn't study enough for the test? What if I fail the test? What if I fail the class? That would make my parents so mad...What if I flunk out of school?

Deep down, I know most of these what ifs will never happen and I should stop worrying. Still, it's hard for me to relax. My heart races and my body gets all jittery, making it hard to fall asleep. The longer it takes to fall asleep the more frustrated I get, which stresses me out even more. **I GET SO RESTLESS, SOME NIGHTS I'M UP UNTIL 2 OR 3 IN THE MORNING!**



I try to put off going to bed, hoping I'll be so tired that I'll fall asleep as soon as my head hits the pillow. Unfortunately, it hasn't worked yet.

Most mornings, I wake up exhausted and cranky. It's hard to be in a good mood when I'm tired day after day. I try to give myself a pep talk as I get ready. I say to myself today will be better, and I'll be relaxed enough to get some sleep tonight and feel better.

This morning, I'm in a bad mood again. When I got to school, I hung with my friends before class started, like I normally do. But I didn't really want to talk or hang out. I just wanted to get the day over with so I could go home and chill. I stood emotionless while my friends laughed and joked around. Darius looked at me, somewhat confused. "What's up with you, dude?" he asked.

"NOTHING!" I SNAPPED. "You guys just aren't funny. It's the same stupid jokes every day."

“Oh, my bad,” Jayden said in his snarkiest voice. “Next time we’ll try to keep you entertained.” Then the bell rang. My friends grabbed their bookbags and walked off to class. Why did I do that, I wondered? Ugh, I always do that! Why can’t I just keep my mouth shut and not start a fight? I can’t believe I went off on my friends. Now I have another thing to worry about, friends hating me. **WHAT A TERRIBLE WAY TO START THE DAY!**





Chapter 2

SNAPPING AT MY FRIENDS PUT ME IN AN AWFUL FUNK. I WAS IN CLASS, STARING AT THE CLOCK, WAITING FOR THE BELL TO RING. I SHOULD'VE BEEN LISTENING TO MY MATH TEACHER, BUT I COULDN'T CONCENTRATE. IT WAS ALMOST LUNCHTIME, AND I WAS WORRIED ABOUT MEETING UP WITH MY FRIENDS. WOULD THEY STILL BE MAD AT ME? I know I was a jerk this morning, but I didn't mean it. I was just in a bad mood because I was so tired.

Lunch is usually the best part of my day, and not just because I'm usually starving and the food is good. It's fun to hang out with the guys and joke around. I don't usually joke or talk too much in class because I don't want to get in trouble. I hate when my teachers are disappointed in me. Plus, I'm always worried they'll message my parents. It's even worse when my parents are upset with me. Man, I hope this morning's incident won't make lunch messy too.

AT LAST, THE BELL FINALLY GOES OFF! I SHOVE ALL MY BOOKS INTO MY BOOKBAG AND START HEADING OUT OF CLASS WHEN MS. LOPEZ STOPS ME.

"Oscar, can you wait a minute?" she asked, as I tried to speed past her.

"Sure," I said with a tinge of hesitation. I knew when Ms. Lopez asked me to stay, it wasn't really a question. It was more of a command. I leaned against her desk and waited for the rest of the kids to pack up and leave. All I wanted to do was get to lunch. What did Ms. Lopez need to talk to me about anyway?

Once the classroom cleared out, Ms. Lopez stared at me and asked, “Oscar, you seemed distracted during class. **IS EVERYTHING OKAY?**” Did she notice that I was worried? Can everyone tell that I’m worried? My mind filled with self-doubt. “I’m okay. I’m just anxious to see my friends because I was kinda rude this morning, and I don’t want them to be mad.”



“It can be tough to face someone when you’ve made a mistake,” she said. “But it’s good you recognized the mistake, so you can apologize and make it better.”

I tugged on the straps of my backpack and stared at my shoes. “Yeah, I just hope it works. It would be bad if my friends didn’t want to hang out with me anymore or if I ruined lunch for everyone.”

“I bet if you address it the right way, it will all work out. Do you often get worried or stressed about things, Oscar?”

“Ugh...” I mumbled.

How am I supposed to answer? What’s the right answer? I don’t want her to think I’m anxious all the time and there’s something messed up with me. But if I’m being honest, I do get anxious a lot.

“OSCAR, IT’S OKAY if YOU GET STRESSED AND NEED SOME HELP DEALING WITH IT,” Ms. Lopez assured me. “You’re such a good student, and sometimes keeping up with schoolwork can be stressful.”

I was relieved she understood. After an awkwardly long pause, I admitted the truth. “Yeah, I guess I do feel like I need help sometimes.”

“You know, Oscar, Mrs. Wang is restarting a counseling group for kids to meet and talk about ways to deal with anxiety. She’s run the group before, and it’s great. I could ask her to talk to you, if you think you’d be interested in joining?”

“Mrs. Wang, the school counselor?”

“Yes, she’s really easy to talk to and helps a lot of students.”

I don’t care how easy she is to talk to, I don’t want anyone to know I’m anxious. What will everyone think?

“I don’t know, Ms. Lopez,” I said, as I searched for any excuse to shut this conversation down and get to lunch. But she persisted. “Let me tell her you may be interested, and she can explain the group to you. You can always say no.”

“Okay, I guess so,” I said, knowing I was never joining a group like that.

"**GREAT!** I'll let you get to your next class.

Do you need a pass?"

"No, I'm just going to lunch."

"Okay, bye Oscar!"

"Bye," I said and nervously hurried off to the cafeteria.

By the time I went through the lunch line and got to my usual table, all my buddies were laughing and finishing their lunch.

"What's up?" I asked, pretending like my morning freak out never happened.



Pages 17-63 are not included in this excerpt.

OSCAR IS A PERFECTIONIST WITH AN ANXIETY PROBLEM!

He tries hard to excel at everything – academics, sports, and music. But the pressure to always perform his best is overwhelming.

Oscar is so afraid of falling short of expectations and disappointing his parents, his teachers, and his pals, he can't sleep. The more sleep he loses, the more exhausted he becomes. A tired Oscar is a grouchy Oscar, and he lashes out at his best buddies. Now his anxiety is topped with guilt and shame.



When a caring teacher notices Oscar's distress, she invites him to join a school support group for students who struggle with anxiety. What will he do? Is Oscar too embarrassed to seek help, or is he so tired of being tired, he'll try anything for some sleep and relief?

My Anxiety is Messing Things Up is an easy-to-read chapter book about the power of courage and confidence to beat back fear and worry!



JENNIFER LICATE received her master's degree in school counseling from West Chester University and has worked as a school counselor for more than ten years. Jennifer works with children from kindergarten to 12th grade. She channels her love of counseling and creativity to craft children's books with relatable characters and situations. Her aim is to help children of all ages navigate the challenges of growing up.

SUZANNE BEAKY studied illustration at Columbus College of Art and Design.

Her expressive illustrations are commissioned by children's book, magazine and educational publishers worldwide. She has received a number of awards and lives in Pennsylvania with her husband.