

NOAH'S GROWING UP DIARY

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SICK!





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# I AM SICK!



Noah, a six-year-old boy with a newly born little sister and his parents were watching a TV news report.

"More than 30 people are suspected of being infected with an unknown disease. Fever, dizziness, sore throat and vomiting are the most prevalent symptoms among these individuals. Health experts are working hard to figure out what is causing this disease," said the reporter.



"My friend told me that one of her colleague's children became ill last week and was sent to hospital. They are afraid that the child has become infected with this unknown disease. Everyone is worried. I think we should be cautious as well," Dad said to Mum, concerned about the family's health.

"Yes, but there's no need to be over concerned," said Mum, as she tried to reassure them. "Keeping up our personal hygiene in the same way as before will be enough. Remember to wash your hands before eating, and put your clothes in the washer every day, Noah."

"I washed my hands just now!" Noah said.





The following day when Noah returned to school, Miss Chan, the class teacher, shared some news with the class.

“There has recently been an unknown disease affecting some people in our society. Unfortunately, a student in our school has also been infected. We will arrange a thorough cleaning of the entire campus and everyone is required to wash their hands before having lunch,” said Miss Chan.

When Noah came home, he immediately told Mum and Dad about his concern.

“Someone in our school has got that unknown disease. I may have been using the same classroom or toilet as them. I don’t want to be infected,” said Noah, worried.

“That’s why I’ve been reminding you to keep up your personal hygiene,” Mum assured.

“I feel like I’ve got a sore throat. Am I infected? I don’t want to die!” Noah was worried.

“Don’t worry. Drink more water and go to bed early tonight. You will be better tomorrow,” said Dad.



A colorful illustration of a bedroom. A young boy with black hair and a sad expression is lying in a bed with a blue blanket. A woman with long black hair, wearing a purple top, stands by the bed, looking at the boy with a worried expression. The room has green and blue striped wallpaper, a wooden bookshelf with books, a globe, and a small rocket ship on top. A window with yellow curtains is visible in the background. A speech bubble is positioned above the mother.

When Noah awoke the next morning, he felt slightly unusual.

"It's breakfast time, Noah! Get up now!" Mum called.  
"My body feels really heavy and I have no energy to move. I think I am sick, Mom!" Noah coughed.  
"Are you alright, Noah?" Mom asked.  
"I think I have a headache. I can't eat. I will be sick if I eat," Noah murmured.

A colorful illustration of a doctor's office. A doctor with a beard and a white lab coat is sitting at a desk, holding a thermometer to a young boy's forehead. The boy is sitting in a red chair, looking uncomfortable. A woman with long black hair, wearing a purple top, stands behind the boy, looking on with a concerned expression. The doctor's desk has a computer monitor and some papers. A speech bubble is positioned above the doctor.

Mum took Noah to the doctor. "How are you feeling, little boy?" inquired the doctor. "Ahem, ahem, ahem. I'm in a lot of pain, Doctor. I had a headache and I think I am going to get a fever very soon," Noah said haltingly.

The doctor used a thermometer to check Noah's body temperature. It was 36°C, a normal body temperature. The doctor then examined Noah's throat but everything appeared normal.

"Your body check says there is nothing to worry about. However, if you believe you are not feeling well, drink more water and remember to follow healthy living practices. Get some more rest," the doctor recommended.

Back at home, Mum reassured Noah.

“There will be no schoolwork or games today, Noah. All you have to do now is sleep. Take more rest, and you will feel better soon,” Mum said.

Noah got onto his bed and closed his eyes, attempting to fall asleep. However, Noah could not fall asleep because a suspicion had been troubling him all day.



Noah hid beneath his blanket and curled up into a ball. He took out a tablet, which Mum had given him for doing homework, and searched for the terms “fever,” “unknown disease,” and “infection” on the internet.



Noah was taken aback by the search results. “The majority of patients who are infected with the unknown disease experience a fever, sore throat, and vomiting,” stated one article on the internet. Noah sobbed, tears streaming down his cheeks. “I am infected. I will die soon! I am going to miss my parents and my younger sister.”



"I am still not feeling well, Mum. After last night, I am not feeling any better. Can I stay at home today?" Noah pleaded. She placed her palm on Noah's forehead to check his body temperature. "It seems like you don't have a fever but let me first fetch a thermometer and do a check-up," Mum said.



Noah began to imagine and worry about all the things that would happen following his infection. It was a long night, as Noah almost didn't fall asleep. Noah resisted Mum's attempt to get him out of bed the following morning when she entered his room.

While waiting for Mum, Noah began to wail. His cries woke up Ball, a Super Ball from the Universe, who was in the corner of the room.





We will say goodbye soon because I am dying. I think I'm infected with an unknown disease but I don't know how to tell Mum and Dad.



Why do you think you are infected?



I have been dizzy and suffering from a headache over the past few days. It is the same as those infected patients. If I don't have the disease, why don't I feel better after a day?



Simply having a headache does not mean that you are infected by the disease. You curled your body under your blanket the entire night—that was what made you feel uncomfortable. You didn't get enough sleep last night and that's why your headaches are not going away.



Do you really think that I am not infected?



Try to keep up with your regular daily activities, and your body will give you the answer. If you are still worried, talk to your parents.





Mum came back into Noah's room with a thermometer. "What did you mean when you said that you were having a headache?" Mum asked while taking Noah's temperature.

"Hmm... I am not sure. I'm just afraid that I have caught the unknown disease. A student in my school had it recently," Noah said.



"You won't be infected just because you go to the same school as them. But the things you do are important. Did you wash your hands and clothes?" Mum asked.

Mum asked.

"Of course, yes!" Noah answered.

"Then you have done everything that you can to protect yourself. Let's believe the doctor when he says that you are not getting sick. Instead of staying in bed, would you like to join me in preparing the food for our picnic tomorrow?" Mum suggested.

"I am healthy. I can help you!" Noah finally cracked a smile.

# Parents' Corner



What parents need to know about adjustment-related anxiety?

Health anxiety, which affects both adults and children, is a condition where people feel extremely worried and afraid of falling sick or even dying. This can occur due to a frequent exposure to illness-related news topics, such as reports of people dying from the spread of a virus. Children who are frequently exposed to such information may develop fears about dying or imagine themselves dying from illness. Another common source of this fear comes from knowing about or seeing a person suffering from a fatal illness. Fearful thoughts can begin to build up and the children may imagine a similar fate for themselves.

Seeing a loved one who is very unwell, vomiting and fainting, can be a frightening situation for a child to go through. However, this by no means implies that a child's character is "weak" or "cowardly." Rather, children naturally have more fears than adults, and this is how anxiety can change our thoughts and behaviors.

The fear of falling sick or dying is common and can subside within a few weeks when appropriate care is provided. Sometimes, parents can also have anxiety about the health of their children. Nonetheless, if this anxiety begins to modify the parents' or child's behavior and routine—such as spending hours daily Googling illnesses or refusing to attend school, work or family gatherings for fear of catching an illness—then it becomes a condition that requires professional support, such as from a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Signs of health anxiety can start to appear in children from the age of six, and these include (but are not limited to):

- Asking for temperature checks frequently
- Mentioning one or more health concerns daily e.g., having cancer or a tumor
- Talking about feeling unwell all the time even after a doctor has confirmed that the child is healthy and well
- Regularly saying that they have found a lump in their body or are experiencing body pains
- Being afraid of meeting a person who is ill or watching TV reports about illness
- Often wanting to wear a band aid
- Spending hours Googling about illnesses and diseases, and knowing too much about them

What can we help children with health anxiety?

**Tell your child about a time when you felt worried or afraid for the health of a loved one, and how you worked through your anxiety.**

- This will help your child to learn that it is OK to have fears and to talk about them.
- They will then feel that you truly understand and support them without judgement.

**Talk about different bodily sensations with your child.**

- Explain to them that what they are feeling are not symptoms of illness but normal bodily sensations that we all feel.

**Explain to your child that spending too much time on the internet reading about an illness can cause their fear to grow stronger.**

- Encourage them to focus on other hobbies instead.

**Develop a self-care routine with your child that is centered on activities that they love, especially those activities that stimulate their sense of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch.**

- This can help your child to focus fully on something else that can also reduce their stress and worry.

**There is no need to force, scold or punish them if they are afraid because that will only make their anxiety worse.**

**Let the school know about your child's anxiety so they get consistent support at home and at school.**

If you are worried about your child's health anxiety or notice that it is starting to affect their daily lives negatively—such as by disrupting their attendance in school or participation in other activities—it is important that you speak to a mental health professional such as a psychologist or psychiatrist. You are not alone in facing this and your child can get better with professional help.

Visit our website to learn more mental health tips:  
[howareyou.msf.hk/en/anxiety/](http://howareyou.msf.hk/en/anxiety/)

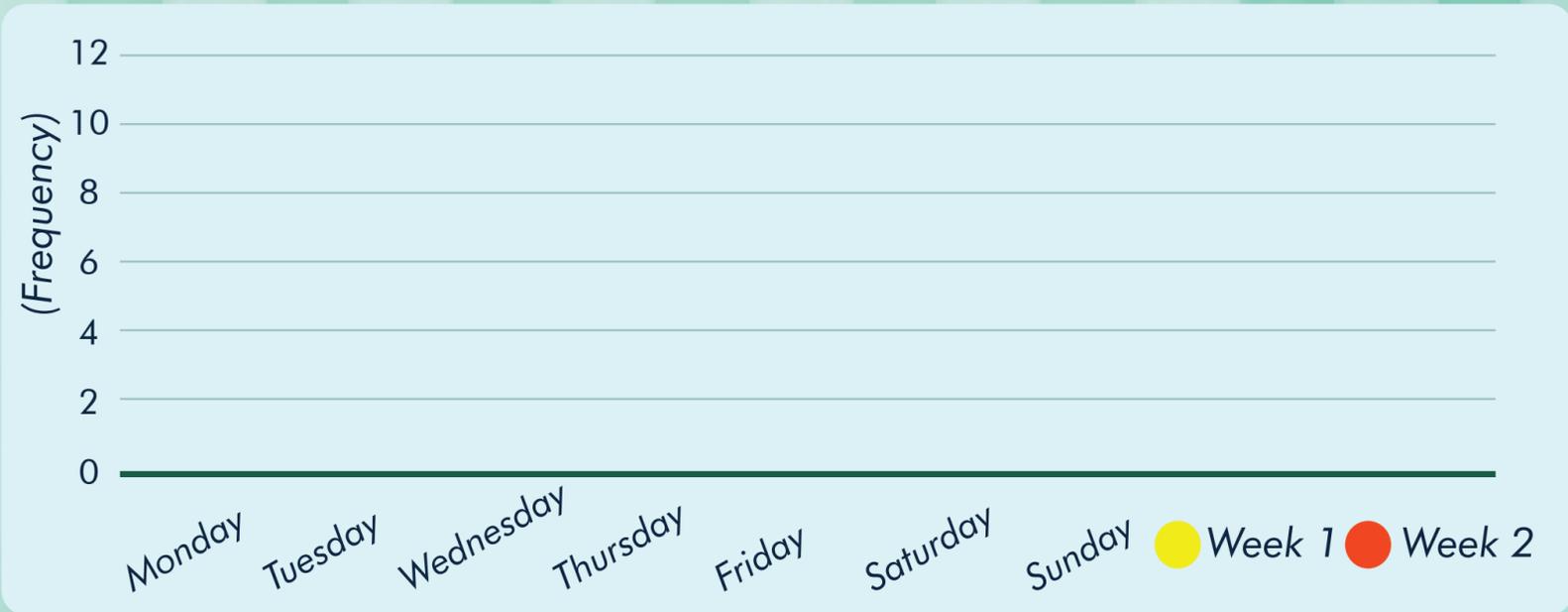


# Relaxation Time for Parents and Kids

## Step by step

If you think that you are worrying a lot about your own health or the health of your child, you can do something about it now. Just keeping a daily record of how often you are searching for health-related information on the internet or trying to see a doctor can help you to reduce these habits that stem from anxiety. Set a target for yourself to gradually lower the frequency of such habits over two weeks. Each time you check your health condition, color one grid on the bar corresponding to that day of the week.

My goal: to make \_\_\_\_\_ (a behavior) frequency to \_\_\_\_\_ times after two weeks



**Tip:** Don't blame yourself or your children if you don't reach your aim with the first try. Give yourself a second chance and you will eventually be able to reach your goal.

## Connect the Dots

Draw a line to connect the dots from 1 to 30 to reveal the images.



Guess what Noah and the Ball are doing? Try to follow them.

**Tip:** It helps a lot to take a break from the things that are worrying you and your kids. It might be as simple as a few minutes of deep breathing, meditation or just playing with your kids

**There are many ways to help your child cope with anxiety. Explore the best way with your child!**



### **About Médecins Sans Frontières**

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an international, independent, medical humanitarian organisation that delivers emergency aid to people affected by armed conflict, epidemics, natural disasters and exclusion from healthcare. We offer assistance to people based on need and irrespective of race, religion, gender or political affiliation. In 1998, MSF formally recognised the importance of providing mental healthcare as part of its emergency work.

### **About “Noah’s Growing Up Diary”**

“Noah’s Growing Up Diary” is a series of three storybooks on mental health created and produced by MSF Hong Kong with the support of MSF psychologists. The story is centred around Noah, a six-year-old boy, who started attending primary school and who will soon be a big brother. The stories are designed to help children to prepare for and go through challenging circumstances and as a support for parents to draw out conversation with their kids. Noah’s emotional experience is normal and common amongst kids going through transitions. We highly recommend parents to read the storybook series with their kids.



*I don't want to be a brother*



*First day of School*



*I am sick!*

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