

REVISED EDITION

WHAT TO DO WHEN FEAR INTERFERES

**A Kid's Guide to
Overcoming Phobias**

A WORKBOOK
for Kids
from the
AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

Includes:

SCIENCE-BACKED
SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

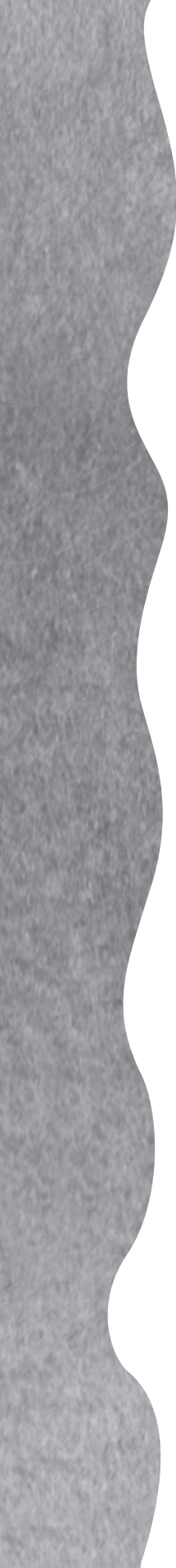
KID-FRIENDLY
EXPLANATIONS

DRAWING AND
WRITING ACTIVITIES

A NOTE FOR GROWN-UPS



By Claire A. B. Freeland, PhD
and Jacqueline B. Toner, PhD
Illustrated by Janet McDonnell



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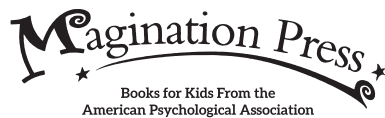
illustrated by
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Magination Press • Washington, DC
American Psychological Association

For brave children everywhere who face their fears—CABF

For Eric, who is always there—JBT

To Jerome, who has always encouraged me to soar—JM



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Magination Press, Books for Kids From the American Psychological Association
maginationpress.org

Distributed by Lerner Publisher Services
lernerbooks.com

Book design by Christina Gaugler
Printed by Worzalla, Stevens Point, WI

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available at the Library of Congress
ISBN (pbk): 978-1-4338-4879-7
ISBN (ePub): 978-1-4338-4881-0
ISBN (ePub): 978-1-4338-4880-3
ISBN (PDF): 978-1-4338-4882-7

Manufactured in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

A child with a phobia about elevators, heights, or vehicles may demand that adults take the stairs with them to visit a high floor of a building, cower far from the edge of a vista overlook, or cry when asked to sit in the car during rush hour. Phobias about medical procedures, such as injections or fears of seeing blood, can make routine doctor appointments exceedingly challenging.

If your child has such intense fears, you know that it does little good to tell them that there's nothing to be afraid of. Pointing out that a high bridge has a sturdy guard rail will not result in their now feeling comfortable to walk across it. Phobias are by definition irrational. That is, while the person experiencing them may be having physical and emotional reactions similar to ones they would have in the face of immediate danger, the situation they are in doesn't present an actual significant threat. So, telling them they are safe doesn't help to reduce their fears or to convince them to proceed normally with activities that trigger the phobia.

The approach presented in this book will work most effectively with the help of a parent or other adult "coach." Of course, adults often struggle with the same fears as kids. This can make it hard to guide a child in overcoming a fear. If this is the case for you, note that the same process presented in this book can work to lessen your

own fears. Don't hesitate to enlist the help of your pediatrician or a mental health professional for support or further guidance.

The most effective way to overcome a phobia is exposure, which requires the child to experience the feared object for a period of time long enough for their extreme physical and emotional reactions to dissipate. One of the greatest challenges in helping a child overcome a phobia can be convincing them to hang in there rather than avoid their fear, and to provide support as they do so. It's important to approach the trigger in a gradual way. Initially, you may need to help your child choose tasks that are far removed from the feared experience, such as imagining a thunderstorm or looking at pictures of insects.

Taking it slowly and letting your child experience success by overcoming mildly frightening versions of scary situations will allow them to build confidence in facing increasingly more feared situations.

Phobias can result from frightening or traumatic experiences but, more often, they don't have a known source. Children who tend to be anxious may be particularly likely to develop a specific phobia. You might find other books in the *What-to-do Guides for Kids* series helpful to address related emotional challenges.

Children are particularly susceptible to developing

"vicarious fears." This happens when they observe another person reacting with intense fear. Or, a fear can develop vicariously by watching a movie where another is afraid or even from a news report that accentuates the damage caused by a storm or the outbreak of a particular illness this season.

As you help your child gradually face feared experiences, be aware of messages in their world that may serve to reinforce their fears. Gently redirect adult conversation about impending weather events, recent accidents, or out-of-control animals. Judiciously monitor your child's experiences with frightening messages they receive through the media. When such messages get past your best defenses, counter them with more realistic views of possible danger and how they will stay safe.

By developing positive self-talk, your child can learn to focus on rational thinking and self-cheerleading to encourage themselves to proceed with exposure experiences. Providing rewards, both tangible and social, will help them to feel accomplishment and pride in taking on gradually more difficult challenges. Learning coping strategies that help them to relax and de-stress can reduce overall anxious tendencies, making success more likely.

With this book you can help guide your child through the process of overcoming a phobia in a gentle but systematic way. Remember to take it slowly. Work through a chapter or two at a time and encourage your child to do the exercises provided. If your child is hesitant about facing fears, help them to choose experiences to start with that are not very threatening. As they progress, you will

both be surprised that challenges that at first seemed insurmountable will diminish in intensity. And, learning to overcome their fears can result in more freedom to engage in activities and with others with greater self-assurance. Watch your child soar to new heights of confidence!



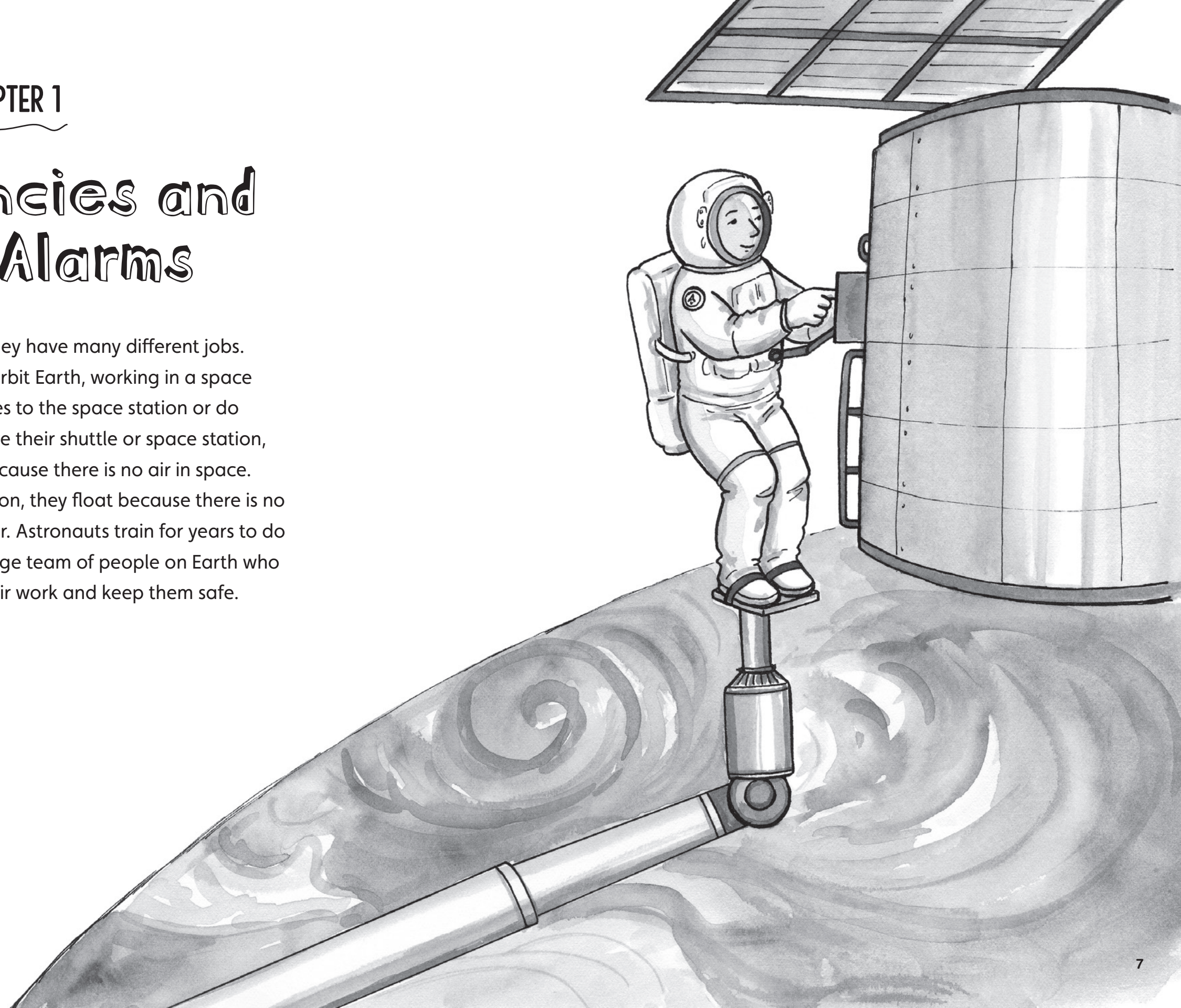
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CHAPTER 1

Emergencies and False Alarms

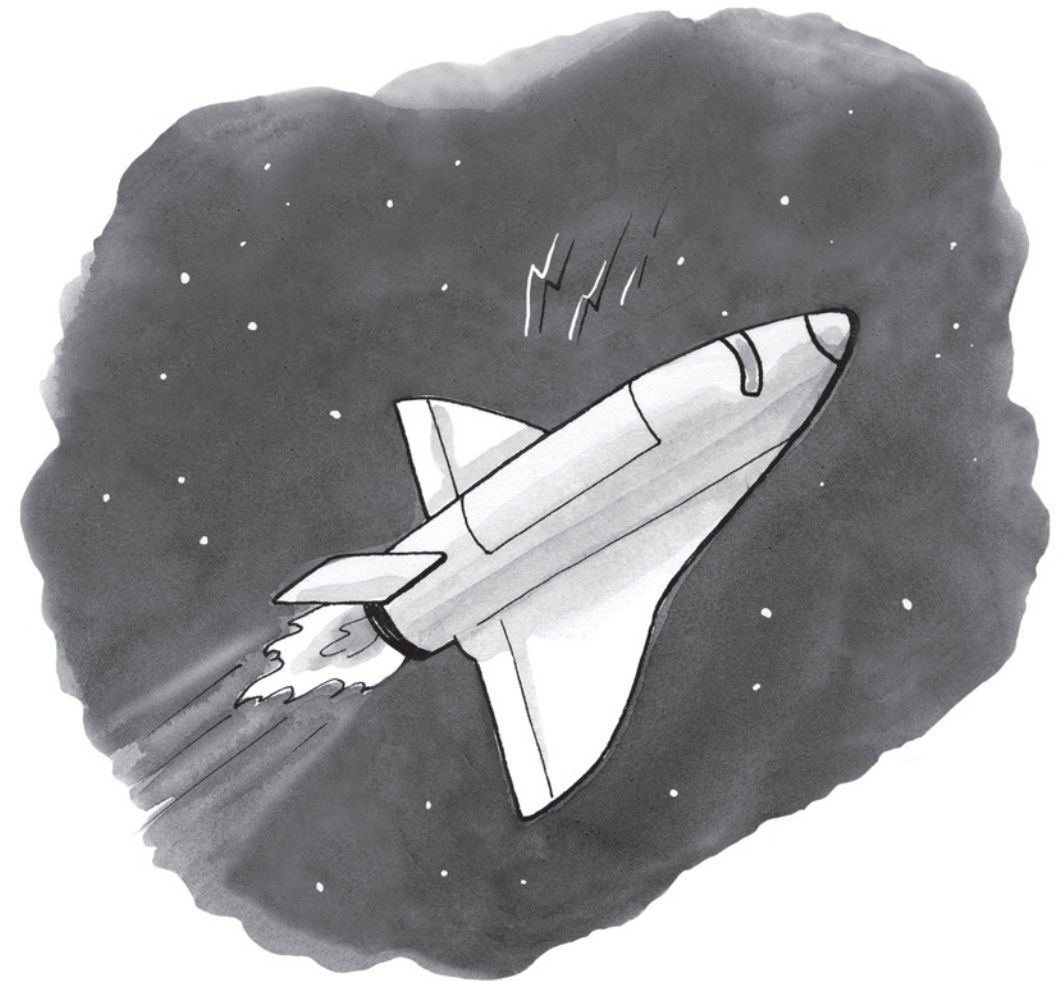
Astronauts fly to outer space. They have many different jobs. Some fly the spacecraft. Some orbit Earth, working in a space station. They might bring supplies to the space station or do science experiments. If they leave their shuttle or space station, they wear special space suits because there is no air in space. When they are in the space station, they float because there is no gravity to keep them on the floor. Astronauts train for years to do their jobs well. There is also a huge team of people on Earth who use computers to help guide their work and keep them safe.



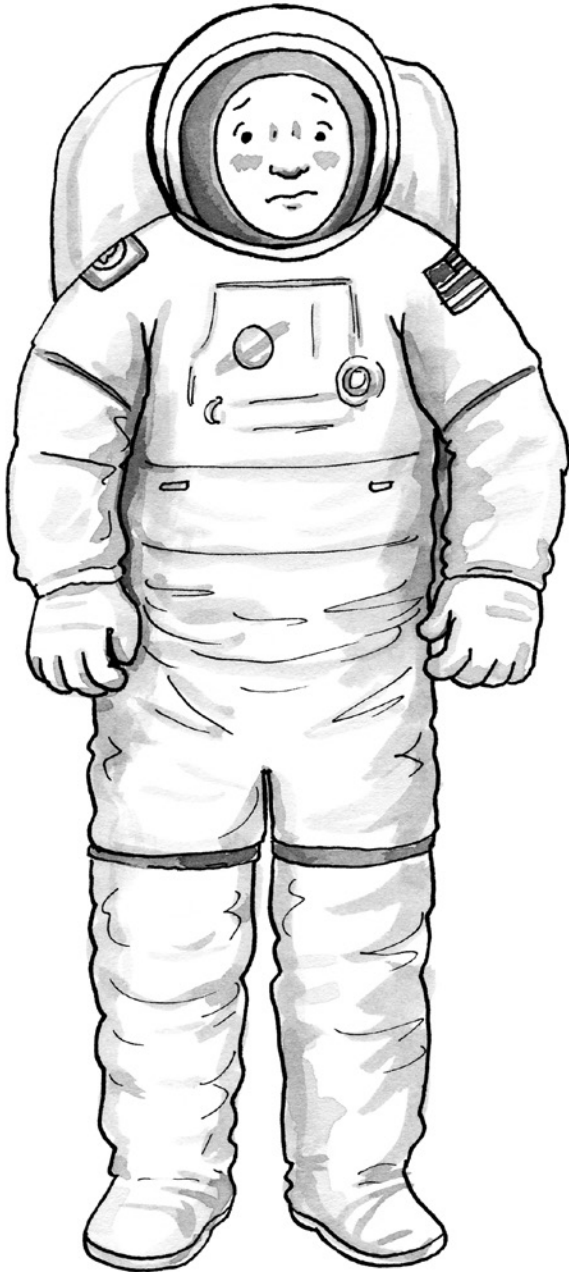
Imagine going into space! What is it like to be weightless and float through the air? What parts of space would you want to explore?

Draw or write about interesting things to experience in space.

One of the reasons that astronauts spend so much time preparing for space travel is that they have to be ready for anything. Space travel is very complicated and emergencies are possible. A space shuttle has all kinds of alarms and flashing lights to alert the crew to any problem that needs attention right away. Astronauts are generally very brave, but if something goes wrong, it can feel quite scary.



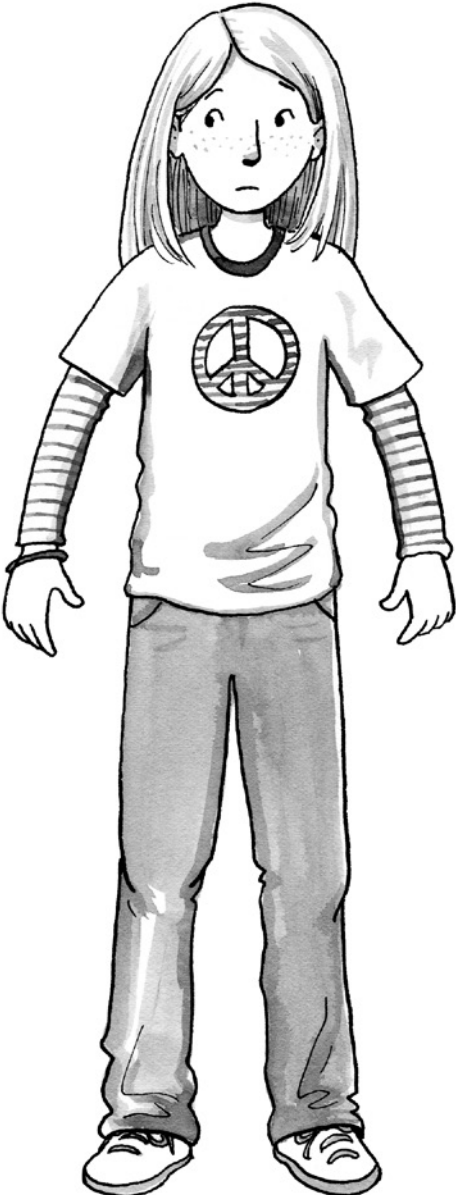
Our bodies also send out alarm signals when something happens that could be a problem. What are the signals in our bodies that tell us there's something scary going on? When astronauts face emergencies, their hearts may race. Their faces may get red and their breathing may speed up. They are super focused and working with the team to solve the problem.



thinking what to do
face red
heart racing
breathing fast

In an emergency, you would probably respond in a similar way: Your heart may beat faster, you might feel out of breath, and your body may shake. You may feel afraid. Feeling afraid is your body's way of alerting you to an emergency. These reactions tell you that you need to take action to avoid danger.

Circle what you feel when you are afraid.



face red
heart racing
stomach ache
sweaty skin
shaky legs

thinking what to do
dry mouth
breathing fast
other:
