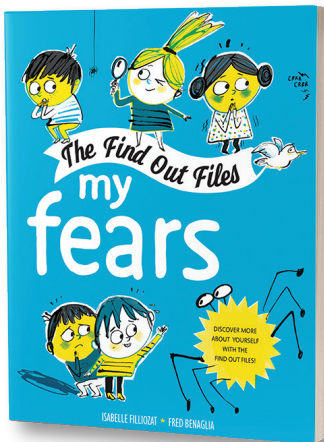




AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Magination Press's new series of activity books, The Find Out Files, help kids explore emotions and relationships.



Magination Press interviewed author and parenting expert, Isabelle Filliozat, about creating *My Fears*, one of the books in The Find Out Files.

Magination Press: You chose a meerkat as the animal guide for *My Fears*. Why is a meerkat well-suited to the topic of fear?

Isabelle Filliozat: Meerkats are called the sentinels of the desert. They have this behavior of looking around and paying attention to any movement, this quick reaction. That's why I choose them to illustrate the "protection from danger" system. Fear being the primary emotion of that system.

MP: You explain how fear is a physical reaction that protects us from danger, and so sometimes fear is a good thing. Why is it important for people to learn to tell the difference between real dangers and perceived ones?

IF: If it is a real danger, fear is useful. It can save us. Fear helps us perceive danger, see a movement, identify a threat. It gives us the energy to step aside, run, escape. But if it is not a real danger, there's no use to stress our body like that ! Shivering in front of a mouse, or a dead rat, panicking on a plane or choking in an elevator doesn't bring us any positive benefit. But all those irrational fears come from our story and if we listen to them, and analyse their roots, they help us cure our inner-self.

MP: How did you decide which common fears (swimming, monsters/nightmares, or meeting new people) to feature in the book?

IF: I wanted to feature a physical fear, a mental fear, and a social fear. Then you have tools for about any fear.

MP: Sometimes, when people are afraid, they get angry. Why is that?

IF: Because it is the same structure in the brain that sends the order for fear or anger: the amygdala. Both emotions ensure protection. When there is a threat,

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the amygdala triggers the stress reaction. Depending on the circumstances, we have three possibilities: fight, flight, freeze. So facing a danger, someone may display a fighting behavior.

Also, if you were taught as a child that you shouldn't be afraid, that boys don't fear, you fear your fears! You don't want to surrender to fear, don't want to be seen as a coward... so you display aggressive behavior.

Or if you were beaten or harshly scolded when you were afraid, then feeling fear is so stressful, so you attack!

Some people like scary movies or books. Why do you think that is?

Some people like taking physical risks, to climb cliffs, to drive their motorcycle fast, to jump from high bridges, to surf big waves. Stress, fear—it's adrenaline. It's sensations. It's excitement. It's feeling alive! But we don't all dare take risks! Almost all of us like suspense in movies or books, we identify with the characters, we feel sensations, quiver, thrill, our heart beats faster while seated in a comfortable chair. But when you love only very scary and horrible movies, it can be for different reasons. Some learned to be strong, they shut their emotions and need powerful stimuli to feel alive. They don't like love stories they consider honeyed. They are not accustomed to feeling love, and don't feel comfortable seeing people loving each other.

Some had a terrible infancy, they were mistreated, they felt terrified most of the time. Then, accustomed to a certain degree of violence, at the same time, their amygdala needs more intense stimulation to react, and they feel somehow more comfortable with a certain level of threat because they are so used to it.

Some were left alone as infants, nobody listened to their emotions, so they also buried their feelings deep inside. They built a tough wall around their inner self. So they need strong outside stimuli to wake any feeling inside.

MP: Why did you include the fear thermometer and monster spray cut outs? Did you think of those or did your illustrator, Fred Benaglia?

IF: I did. The fear thermometer is very important for different reasons.

- One: measuring fear invites the frontal brain of the child to think and it prevents him from sinking into the fear.
- Two: it helps communication between the child and the adult. Otherwise, the adult may minimize or exaggerate the fear of the child. We need a means to display the intensity of the emotion.
- Three: the idea of a thermometer helps to demonstrate that emotion is not an on/off button. It rises, decreases, and is proportional to the threat.
- Four, the thermometer helps identify if the level of emotion arising is proportionate to the threat! The thermometer is a very useful tool.

The monster spray is a more playful tool; it gives power to the child. But the effect may be more profound than it sounds. The child learns that monsters and any danger may be threatening when you feel powerless, when you are a passive victim, but that you can find tools to fight any danger or threat.

MP: You wrote *My Fears* without a co-author. How is working on a book by yourself different from working with a co-author?

IF: When I am the only author, I work freely, I organize my ideas, I find the activities. I'm the only writer from beginning to end, even if the editor rephrases sometimes and the illustrator adds humor...

But I don't have enough time to write all the books I think can be useful for children and parents! So I asked people I trained to write. They start the book, and I love to see their creativity, the way they display the information we share. I read over and correct if necessary. I check the content, revise the drawings, polish... so it reaches the level of exigency I am known for. In the first books, I also always write the booklet for adults.

MP: Is there something you are afraid of—like snakes or public speaking? If so, what do you do to manage that fear?

IF: I had many, many fears... But I cured myself. I was my first guinea pig! Everything I teach, I experienced. I was terrified of dogs, I now have three, and big ones. I feared dead animals, I can now take a dead bird in my hands to decently bury it. I feared heights, and I can now climb a ladder or hang on a cliff. I was very timid and now I speak on radio and TV shows, and I give presentations at conferences in large halls before two thousand people. As a therapist, I cannot keep fears! It wouldn't be honest. Consistency is an important value for me.

MP: Do you have a bravery object? If so, what is it?

IF: I use a poem card game. Seventy poems written by a dear friend of mine, a wonderful poet. When I need courage to face an important event, I draw a card, read the poem... and his words help me focus. It's my "monster spray", as it gives me an internal attitude.

Hear Ms. Filliozat describe The Find Out Files in [this video](#).