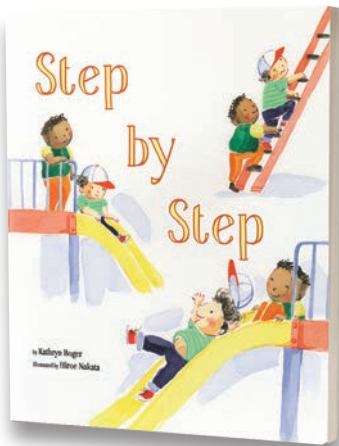




AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

## *Step by Step:* Interview with the author



Magination Press interviewed Dr. Kathryn Boger about writing her book, *Step by Step*.

Here's what she had to say about Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and creating a book that helps kids face their fears.

**You can purchase the full book with 20% off and free domestic shipping [here](#). Enter code MPKIDS20 at checkout.**

### **Magination Press: What inspired you to write *Step by Step*?**

**Kathryn Boger:** My career has been focused on the treatment of pediatric anxiety. A key element of CBT for anxiety is exposure. That means helping people face their fears, rather than avoid them because avoidance grows anxiety over time. I wanted to write a book that planted the seed early on, that it's important and helpful to take steps to face the things that feel scary in order to learn that you can handle them. I also wanted to empower parents and caregivers with language and tools to support their child in facing the things that make them feel afraid. In essence, this book is about giving children and parents a new way of responding to things that feel scary, empowering them to approach instead of avoiding.

### **MP: When you were a child, did you experience anxiety? If you did, what kinds of things or situations were difficult for you?**

**KB:** As a child, I tended to get anxious about speaking in class. As a result, I didn't raise my hand much and only spoke up when I was certain of the answer. I remember my fifth-grade teacher pulling me aside and asking what I had to lose if I spoke up. She asked me to start taking more chances in sharing my ideas with the class, and she helped me come up with a plan to gradually start raising my hand more. I followed the plan, and it really helped me to grow my confidence over time.

### **MP: What do you do now when you feel anxious about something?**

**KB:** When I'm feeling anxious about something now, I pause and take a few slow breaths to center myself. I then try to identify how I'm feeling and what I'm thinking. This allows me to choose how I want to respond in the moment, rather than operating on autopilot. For example, I might notice in the moment that my brain is beating me up with self-defeating thoughts, and I could then choose to view the thoughts as just thoughts - or a string of words - rather than my reality.

**[WWW.APA.ORG/PUBS/MAGINATION/STEP-BY-STEP](http://WWW.APA.ORG/PUBS/MAGINATION/STEP-BY-STEP)**

**MP: This book explores cognitive behavior therapy and the process of exposure to help build tolerance to stressful situations. Is using CBT different for children than it is for adults?**

**KB:** The core principles of CBT are consistent across age groups; however, the associated interventions are applied differently for children as compared to adults. Specifically, the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral interventions and examples in CBT should be adjusted according to the age and developmental stage of the child. In addition, CBT for children should involve the family and, ideally, the school. This is because children operate in systems, and the most effective way to treat them is to include the systems in which they operate so that everyone is on the same page. Younger children may also benefit from games and fun activities to bring CBT interventions to life, in addition to behavior charts and rewards, in order to increase motivation for behavior change.

**MP: In the story, Sam is successful in each of his steps and is able to eventually enjoy the experiences he felt anxious about. What would a parent or caregiver do if their child isn't ready to take the next step?**

**KB:** If a child isn't feeling ready to take the next step, I would first advise the parent or caregiver to validate the child's emotion in the situation. This is a very important step that is easy to skip. Then I would suggest that they talk with the child about what was getting in the way of taking the next step. I would recommend leading with curiosity and helping the child figure out for themselves what the obstacles are. Then, I would recommend problem-solving with the child about how to manage the obstacles. For example, maybe the child needs to practice the current step more, maybe they need another intermediate step or two before taking this particular step, or maybe it would be helpful to build in a small reward if their motivation is dipping.

**MP: What was it like to see your illustrator Hiroe Nakata's interpretation of your words?**

**KB:** It was truly magical to see the scenes in my head come to life on the pages with Hiroe's beautiful artwork. I appreciate the vivid expressions of the characters and how she captured details like the dandelion puffballs and Sam's stuffed animal.

**MP: What is your favorite part about writing a children's book? What is your least favorite part?**

**KB:** My favorite part of the process was brainstorming the story and figuring out how to get my intended message across through different examples. I don't think I had a least favorite part!

**MP: What do you like to do when you aren't writing or working?**

**KB:** When I'm not working or writing, I love spending time with my family. We play soccer, tag, and boardgames, read books, and enjoy Friday Night Movie Nights together.

**MP: Is there a fun fact about you that readers might not know that you'd like to share?**

**KB:** This is the first book I've written! I had to take my own brave steps in submitting it to the publisher because I had no idea how it would be received. Luckily, my kids encouraged me to take this step.

**MP: What was your favorite children's book when you were growing up?**

**KB:** I had many favorite books growing up. One of them was *Eloise* by Kaye Thompson. It's about the adventures of an imaginative and independent little girl who lives at the Plaza Hotel. I remember thinking the book was hilarious and being drawn to Eloise's confidence and adventurous spirit as she fearlessly explored the hotel.