TEEN HANDOUT:

FEAR THERMOMETER

Boston Children's Hospital
Until every child is well™

Anxiety Skill 1

What is a Fear Thermometer?

- You may notice that you worry during many kinds of situations. You may also avoid certain situations or things. The anxiety may feel like it comes out of nowhere, which can make it hard for you to describe to family or friends exactly what makes you anxious. To begin managing your anxiety, you need help naming the problem.
- A fear thermometer is a tool that can do just that. A fear thermometer helps you organize or rank the things and situations that make you anxious. The things/situations that make you only a little worried are near a 1 on the thermometer. The things/situations that make you most worried are usually near the 10 on the thermometer.
- Once you have a better understanding of your worries, you can use the fear thermometer to plan ways to face your fears. These techniques can help you understand something really important: you can do things you want and need to do even when you are worried.

Here's How to Create a Fear Thermometer

Walk through the steps below; your parent can help you if you need it:

1. **Look at the example.** Look at the example. The thermometer goes from 1 to 10. This teen is afraid of frogs! At the bottom near 1 it says, "seeing a frog," because that's something that makes the teen who made this a little worried. At 3 it has "a frog jumping near me" because that makes the teen a little more worried. The thermometer keeps going up like that until we get to 10, "holding a frog", the situation that causes this teen to feel the most worried.
2. **List worries.** Before you make your thermometer, list all of the things you are worried about. You don't have to put them in order yet, just name everything you can think of. If you like, ask your parent for suggestions based on from things you've told them and what they've noticed.
3. **Rate the worries and put them on the Thermometer.** Great job! Naming all of these things and talking about them is an important step to feeling less worried and anxious. Okay, now that you have your whole list, it's time to see where they go on the thermometer. Start with the first fear you wrote. Where would that fit on the thermometer: at the bottom near 1, at the top near 10, or somewhere in the middle?" Keep going! Move on to the next fear on the list.
4. **Use your Fear Thermometer to plan next steps.** Keep your Fear Thermometer handy as you continue to work through this guide. The Fear Thermometer will be a tool to help you understand the details of your worries and pay attention to when you might need help. When these worry situations come up, you will use the skills you are going to learn in this guide to help. If you notice that you have a lot of unrelated, more generalized worries (e.g., if friends like you, thunderstorms, midterm exams, spending the night away from home, etc.), you can use Anxiety Skills 2 and 3 (Relaxation Skills and Thinking Traps) to learn tools to cope. If you notice that you have fears of a specific situation or thing (e.g., animals or heights), the other skills in this guide will be very beneficial, but it will be essential to use Anxiety Skill 4 (Facing Your Fears) to help you learn to face your fears instead of avoiding them.

TEEN WORKSHEET:

MY FEAR THERMOMETER

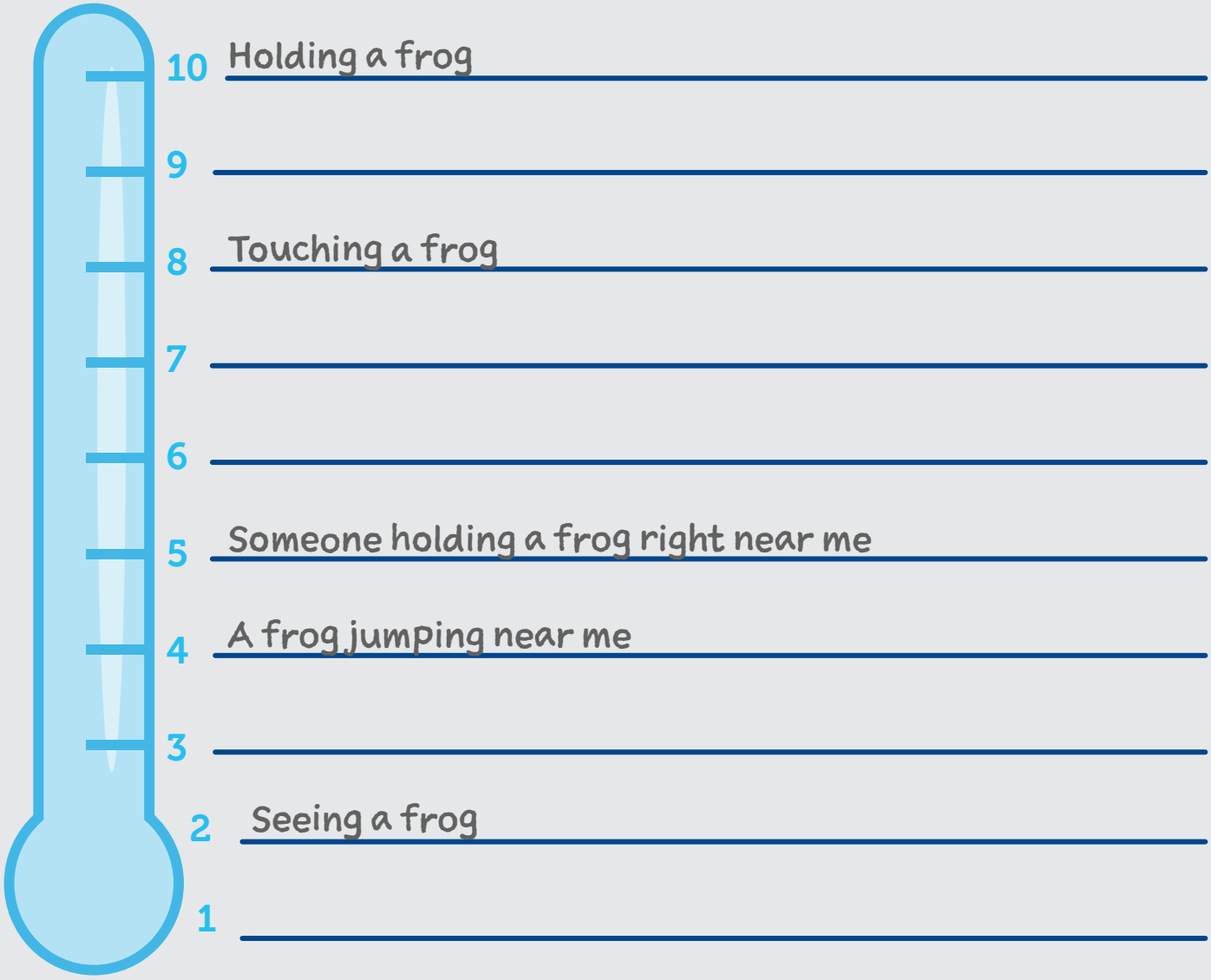
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Anxiety Skill 1

Use this space to brainstorm all the things you are worried about, in no particular order:

frogs
someone holding a frog near me
seeing a frog
holding a frog
touching a frog
a frog jumping near me

Start with the first fear you wrote. Where would that fit on the thermometer: at the bottom near 1, at the top near 10, or somewhere in the middle? Write it down and move on to the next fear.



TEEN WORKSHEET:

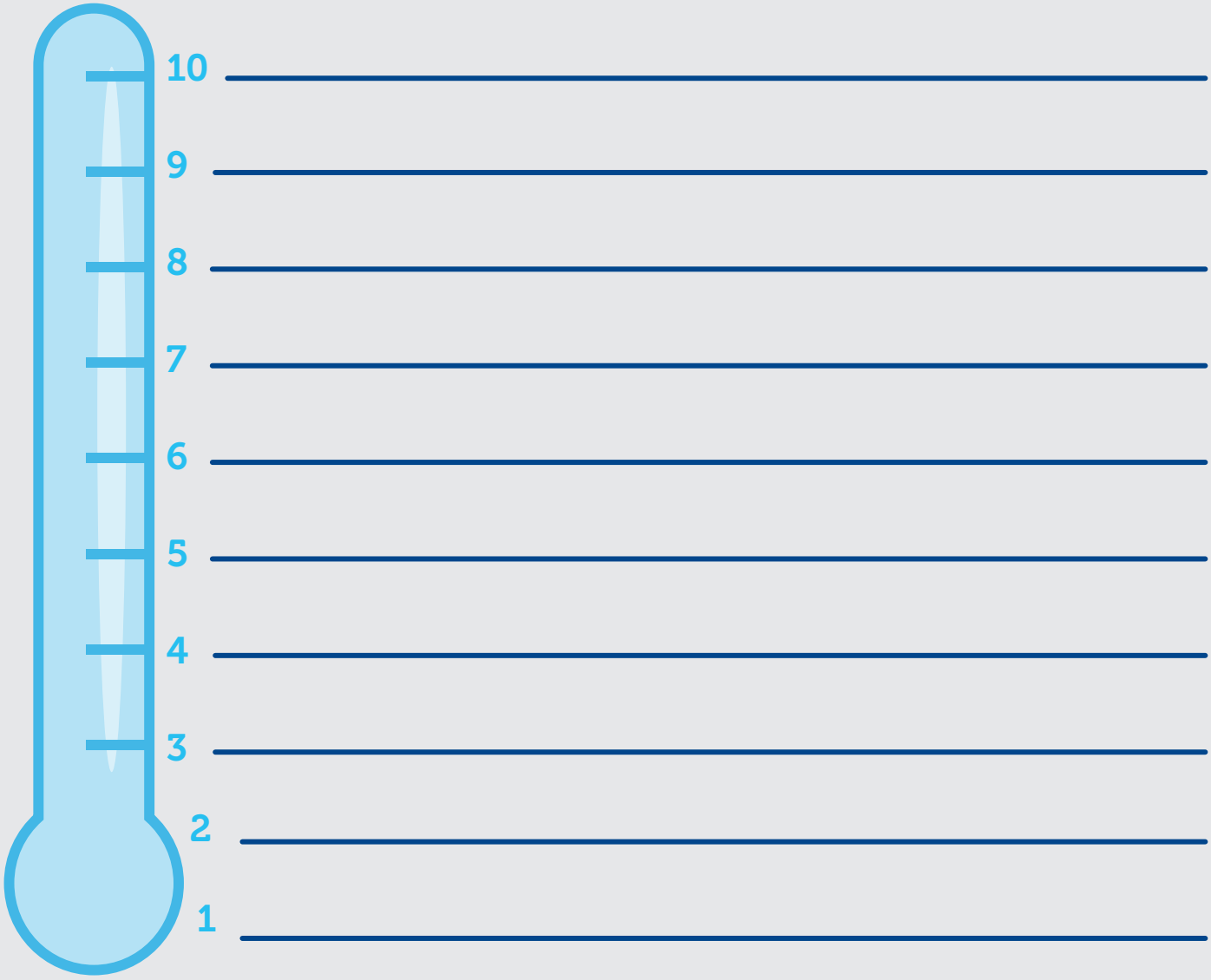
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Anxiety Skill 1

Use this space to brainstorm all the things you are worried about, in no particular order:

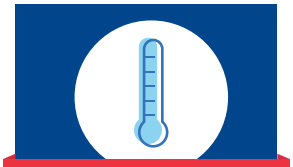
Start with the first fear you wrote. Where would that fit on the thermometer: at the bottom near 1, at the top near 10, or somewhere in the middle? Write it down and move on to the next fear.



TEEN HANDOUT:

FEAR THERMOMETER TIPS

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Anxiety Skill 1

How Can Using a Fear Thermometer Help Me?

- Learning the details about what things or situations make you feel worried is a very important first step towards successfully managing anxiety.
- Increasing your understanding of your anxiety through this process will help you be more aware of when you might need support in situations that cause you stress.
- Learning to identify and express worried feelings helps you notice when a coping strategy (like the Relaxation Skills in Anxiety Skill 2) will be helpful.
- Creating a fear thermometer will also help you make a plan for facing fears. You will be able to start with facing fears that are lower on your ranking list and move up the thermometer as you feel braver (see Anxiety Skill 4, Facing Your Fears).

Common Teen Concerns

I find it hard to rank my fears.

Rating fears can seem strange at first. Look at the example in this guide to help you understand how to describe your fears in more detail. Ask yourself questions to help you rate each fear (e.g., "Is it scarier to speak in a small group or to speak in front of the whole class?). You can change the ratings as needed, so they don't have to be "perfect." Ask a parent or other support person for help if you need it!

I rated everything at a 1 or a 10.

Ordering things from least to greatest is a hard concept! If you notice that you went through your whole list and rated each thing without using the middle ratings, ask yourself if there are some things that don't make you super worried (so less than 10) but also make you feel more than a little worried (so more than 1). If it's feeling too stressful to practice this technique with your actual fears, try to rate something fun (e.g., rate foods from not tasty (1) to the most delicious (10), or heights of family members from shortest (1) to tallest (10).

I get upset while trying to make the ratings.

Thinking about worries can cause "in the moment" anxiety for many people. If you're having a hard time, take a break from making the fear thermometer to relax and then come back to it. Many people feel anxious when talking about their worries, but it's important to do this exercise because in the end it will help you understand your anxiety and feel better.

You may also benefit from learning relaxation skills to manage anxious feelings. Try some of the strategies in Anxiety Skill 2 and see if they make working on your feelings thermometer easier. You can also use the fear thermometer to remember to use relaxation skills (e.g., when your rating gets above a 4, it may be time to take some slow, deep breaths).