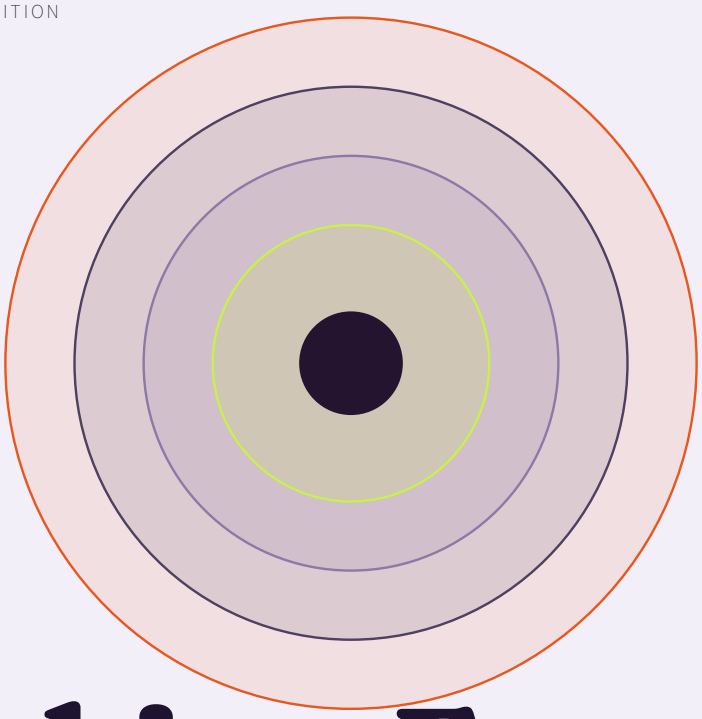


Breaking Free of Child Anxiety and OCD: A Scientifically Proven Program for Parents

A reading of the book by Eli R. Lebowitz (2021)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Breaking Free of Child Anxiety and OCD: A Scientifically Proven Program for Parents, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Eli R. Lebowitz is a psychologist at the Yale Child Study Center who studies and treats anxiety in children and teenagers. This book sets out SPACE, short for Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions, a program in which parents change their own responses and the child does not have to take part. Its first tool is the supportive statement, which pairs acceptance that the fear is real with confidence that the child can cope. Its second is reducing family accommodation: the many small things parents do to help a child avoid fear or calm it, such as answering the same reassurance question or changing family routines. Parents map those accommodations, choose one to change, plan what they will do instead, tell the child calmly in advance, and then follow through. The book works through everyday situations, from bedtime and school mornings to compulsive rituals, and covers how to handle a child's angry or upset reactions along the way.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

You can help an anxious child without asking the child to do anything at all.

SPACE works only through the parents. Many anxious children refuse therapy or won't practise exposures, and the program doesn't need them to. It changes the part parents control, which is how they respond.

2

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Accommodation feels like kindness, but it quietly keeps the anxiety in charge.

Lebowitz calls the changes parents make to spare a child from fear family accommodation. Answering the same question again, staying until they fall asleep, or skipping the party all bring relief today. Over time they teach the child that the fear was right and that they can't cope without you.

3

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A supportive response has two halves: this is hard, and you can handle it.

Acceptance tells the child you see that the fear is real and you are not making fun of it. Confidence tells them you believe they can get through it. Both have to be there at once; each one alone tips into something else.

4

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Protecting and pushing are both natural, and both miss.

Most parents swing between shielding the child from the fear and pressing them to just get over it. Protecting offers acceptance without confidence. Pushing offers confidence without acceptance. Support is the third option that holds both.

5

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Map the accommodations before you try to change any of them.

Many accommodations are so routine that parents no longer see them. Writing down what you do, when, how often and who does it shows the real shape of the problem. It also shows which change would matter most.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Change one accommodation at a time, and choose one that is yours to change.

A good target is something you do, not something the child must do. It happens often enough to matter, and you can keep it up even when the child is upset. Starting small and following through teaches more than a big change you abandon.

7

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Tell your child the plan ahead of time, so the change is a decision and not a punishment.

The change is announced calmly and in advance, in supportive language that names both the difficulty and your confidence. The child doesn't have to agree. Writing the announcement down first helps you keep it short and say it the same way every time.

8

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Your child's distress during the change is expected, not a sign you are failing.

When an accommodation stops, the anxiety usually pushes back first, with tears, anger or bargaining. The book prepares parents for that and for how to stay calm and supportive through it. Holding steady is what lets the child find out they can cope.

9

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Anxiety and OCD rituals follow the same family pattern, so the same plan fits both.

Whether the child is afraid of the dark or needs things checked and repeated, parents often get pulled into the ritual or the avoidance. The book treats both through the same two moves: support the child and step back from the accommodation.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Keep a one-week accommodation log
- [ ] Choose one target
- [ ] Write down what you'll do instead
- [ ] Agree the plan with the other adults
- [ ] Announce the change calmly

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Answer the fear with one supportive line
- ◯ Stay steady through the pushback
- ◯ Notice the moments they cope

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Keep a one-week accommodation log

For seven days, write down each time you change what you do because of your child's anxiety.
Note what you did, when, and who did it. Don't try to change anything yet.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Choose one target

From the log, pick one accommodation that happens often and that you can stop doing yourself.
Leave the rest alone for now.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Write down what you'll do instead

Spell out the situation, what you used to do, and what you will do now, in one or two sentences.
Add what you will say and do if your child gets upset.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Agree the plan with the other adults

Sit down with your partner, or anyone else who cares for your child, and read the plan together.
Everyone should respond the same way, or the anxiety will go to whoever gives in.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Announce the change calmly

Pick a quiet moment, not the middle of a meltdown.
Tell your child what will change and when, say that you know it will be hard, and say that you believe they can manage.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Answer the fear with one supportive line

When the anxiety shows up, say one sentence that holds both halves, such as: I know this feels scary, and I know you can get through it.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Stay steady through the pushback

If your child cries, argues or gets angry about the change, don't debate and don't punish.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Notice the moments they cope

Each evening, write down one moment your child managed something without the old accommodation.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

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2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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December 2026

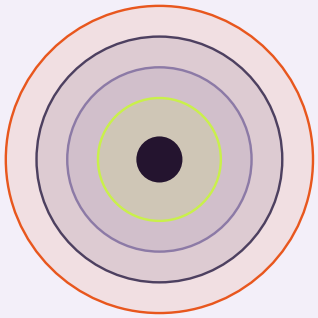
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Believe the fear is real, believe your child can face it, and let your actions say both.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER ELI R. LEBOWITZ

Read it online, and vote on the takeaways: hourlife.com/books/breaking-free-of-child-anxiety-and-ocd
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