

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



What if...?

Sally Mumford and Emma Mackinnon

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About the Book

What if ...

...Your front tooth is knocked out?

...You are staying at a friend's house and by mistake you break something?

...You come home from school and you smell gas?

...Your hamster has escaped?

...You are bullied at school?

...There is a strange man lurking by the playground?

Today's world is perceived to be a much more dangerous place than it was twenty or thirty years ago. Whether it is or not, events can happen in everyday life which can worry, scare or upset a child. *What if . . . ?* aims to provide children with basic, practical, commonsense strategies to deal with life - at school, at home, at a friend's house and out and about.

Containing up to 100 different scenarios, *What if . . . ?* is designed to appeal to children as they learn to deal with life independently and is an essential reference for all parents and teachers who want to bring up confident, happy children.

About the Author

Sally Mumford and Emma Mackinnon are mothers of children ranging in age from six to fourteen and have first-hand experience of many of the *What if . . . ?* scenarios. Emma is also a primary school teacher.

What if . . . ?

Commonsense strategies for kids on
worries, upsets and scares

Sally Mumford and Emma Mackinnon



VERMILION
LONDON

What If

*Last night, while I lay thinking here,
Some Whatifs crawled inside my ear
And pranced and partied all night long
And sang their same old Whatif song:
 Whatif I'm dumb at school?
Whatif they've closed the swimming pool?
 Whatif I get beat up?
 Whatif there's poison in my cup?
 Whatif I start to cry?
 Whatif I get sick and die?
 Whatif I flunk that test?
Whatif green hair grows on my chest?
 Whatif nobody likes me?
Whatif a bolt of lightning strikes me?
 Whatif I don't grow taller?
Whatif my head starts getting smaller?
 Whatif the fish won't bite?
 Whatif the wind tears up my kite?
 Whatif they start to war?
 Whatif my parents get divorced?
 Whatif the bus is late?
Whatif my teeth don't grow straight?
 Whatif I tear my pants?
 Whatif I never learn to dance?
Everything seems swell, and then
The nightmare Whatifs strike again!*

Shel Silverstein From *The Oxford Treasury of Children's Poems* (OUP)

Introduction

AS THE MOTHERS of children ranging in age from 7 to 14 years, we have seen our children through many of the 'What if?' situations that we are including in this book. We don't pretend to have all the answers. In many cases there are no clear answers, but we hope that *What if . . . ?* will help to open up areas of communication between children and their parents and/or carers. (At this point we should mention that we have referred to 'Mum' or 'Dad' in most cases, simply to cut out the clumsiness of writing 'Mum, Dad or your carer' in every instance but, of course, we are aware that not all children are cared for by 'Mum' or 'Dad' and we hope our readers will forgive us for using these terms throughout.)

One of the primary aims of this book is to encourage children and adults to talk together about situations and worries that we all might experience. The real 'solutions' for your family will come from discussing issues together. If you and your child are able to talk together about small events or worries, you have a very good basis for dealing with the bigger and altogether more difficult situations that may emerge throughout your family life. Discovering that your child is doing something dangerous or illegal is not the best time to discover that you don't know how to talk together!

We would all like to protect our children from hurtful, difficult, dangerous or embarrassing situations, but unfortunately, particularly as they get older, we can't. Parents who are able to allow their children to sort out minor problems for themselves are encouraging them to develop important skills they will need later in life. What we *can* do, as parents, is discuss potential problems with our children

before they happen – this will give them confidence, and will also help them to work out coping strategies when faced with other difficult situations.

Discussing with our children how to act in a range of difficult or alarming situations will also help to allay some of our parental anxiety. Should one of these problems arise, we will have a much better idea of what our children will do.

We hope, too, that reading some of these ‘What if?’ scenarios will help children realise that they are not alone in their worries. Lots of children are left out of party invitations, find themselves in awkward threesomes, don’t want to spend the night away from home, desperately want a pet and aren’t allowed one, etc., and we hope that they will feel reassured to know this.

We would like to mention an important issue relating to ‘What if?’ scenarios where your child is without adult supervision. Different organisations have varying guidelines as to when and in what situation you can leave your child unattended. As a parent you must decide when it is safe to leave your child unsupervised, but whenever a child is left alone it is essential that they are easily able to contact a local adult for help should it be necessary.

Lastly, we hope that *What if . . . ?* doesn’t come across as a doom and gloom special! Of course it is very unlikely for your child to be followed in the street by a mugger, or to wake up in the night to a house that is on fire, to come home to a house that has been burgled, or a mother who is unconscious on the floor, but it *can* and *has* happened. However unlikely, these issues do worry, and at the same time fascinate, children. Although we are far from being girl guides, when it comes to our children, the motto ‘Be Prepared’ does seem like a good idea.

We hope you and your children will enjoy reading this book. We have found, during the year that we have researched *What if . . . ?*, that children love thinking up their own answers and comparing them to ours. If you want to

use this book as a form of quiz, cover the suggested strategies with a piece of paper so your children only see the 'What if?' question and the cartoon while they think up their own solutions.

During our research for this book we have drawn on our own experiences and those of many other parents, as well as a number of professional organisations involved in the welfare of children. We have listed these people and organisations in the Acknowledgements.

CHAPTER ONE

Going to School

What if you always seem to be in a rush in the morning and arrive late?

BEING ORGANISED IS the key to getting anywhere on time.

Some suggestions:

- Do you go to bed too late, and then get up too late? If so, make an effort to settle down to sleep earlier so you can get going in the morning.
- Get your own alarm clock so you don't have to rely on anyone else to wake you up.
- Perhaps your Mum or Dad could help you get ready for school, by preparing things the night before.
- Have a set place for keeping your books, pens, school bag, keys and games kit. This can save you a lot of time later and prevent some of those last-minute panics before you set off for school.
- Make a list of the things you need to take on each day and pin it on a notice-board, or your bedroom door. Then you won't forget anything and have to rush back at the last minute.

- Can you sort out what clothes you are going to wear the night before, and get them ready for the morning?



Here I go again!

What if you always seem to set off late because you do your homework after breakfast?

Some suggestions:

- Try to get into the habit of doing any homework the night before, when you have more time.
- If you aren't able to because you're busy doing other things, make sure you get up a bit earlier next morning to give yourself enough time – and get an alarm clock!
- If the reason you can't do your homework the night before is that you always have friends round, or go to friends' houses after school, then perhaps you should think about setting aside a couple of afternoons in the week to get your school projects done.
- Maybe you always watch telly when you get home. If that's the case, try giving yourself a set time to start homework each afternoon, say 5.30, and then you'll get

into good habits. Some families have a rule that the TV or computer stays off until homework is done.

- It's a good idea to start off with the homework you like least, just to get it out of the way.
- The thought of what you have to do is often worse than actually doing it! Rather than thinking about it and worrying it's better to get down to it - then you won't have it hanging over you, making you feel anxious or guilty. Homework often doesn't take that long, so get it out of the way and then enjoy yourself. Being organised is half the battle with homework.
- Have a set place for keeping all the things you need for doing your homework. Then you won't spend ages looking for worksheets or stationery when you could be getting it done.
- Promise yourself a treat, such as a chocolate biscuit, when you've finished. Maybe you can plan your work so that you finish in time for your favourite TV programme.



I wish I hadn't spent all evening in front of the telly.

What if someone you don't know offers you a lift to school?

Never accept it however late you are and however tempted you might be.

If someone you don't know offers you a lift, tell a grown-up straight away. Strangers shouldn't be offering children lifts and the police need to be told.

Some suggestions:

- If you no longer walk to school with an adult it's a good idea to walk to school with other children who live near you.
- If you ever see one of your friends getting into a stranger's car, take the registration number and tell an adult you trust immediately.



No thank you.

What if you tread in dog poo on the way to school?

Yuk! Disgusting!