



Helping Children Overcome Fears

"Mom, can you leave the hall light on?"

"Daddy, are ghosts real?"

"Grandma, make sure there are no spiders in the room!"

Most children have some fears. That is normal. Sometimes it is a good thing. For example, children need to know they shouldn't run into a street. They need to know not to play with knives. A little fear is good. But too much fear is a problem. So is too little fear. A child with too much fear may not want to leave the house. A child with not enough fear may get into a stranger's car. Children's personalities also will influence their fears. One of your children may be scared of more things than your other children. Some children are braver. Some are more shy and fearful.

As children grow up, they learn more about the world around them. As they learn, they get rid of some fears. But they also get new fears. Your children probably will not be scared of the same things in a few years. At any age, you can help your children cope with their fears.

Some children are scared of things that are not common. Maybe they are afraid because their friends are scared. If one child is afraid of cats, another child might learn to be afraid of them too. If the dog is scared of storms, your children may become afraid too.

Sometimes children are scared because something happened to them. Maybe your child had to go to the hospital once and now she is scared of doctors. If a big dog bit a child, he might be scared of dogs. Or children may be scared of dying because someone they loved died. Some children will get over these fears on their own. Others may need extra help. There are some things you can do to help children who are scared.

Ways to Help Your Children

1. Accept your children's fears. All children are scared sometimes. They will outgrow some of their fears. But right now their fears are quite real to them. Don't make fun of them. You can help them learn not to be so scared. These are skills they will use for the rest of their life.

2. Spend time with your children when they are scared. Many children are scared of the dark. Read a story or sing a song with them before tucking them in bed. This will help your children feel safe. Maybe your children are scared of loud noises. Hold them close when you watch fireworks. Play with them in a different room when someone is vacuuming. Comfort them during a thunderstorm.

3. Keep a regular routine. Children feel safe when they know what to expect. It helps some children to know that it is Mom who takes them to childcare in the morning. Other children know that there will be a story every night before bed. Children feel better when they know what will happen.

4. Talk about being scared. When your child looks scared, say to him, "You are biting your fingernails. Does that mean you feel scared?" This helps the child to name what he feels. It also helps when you learn how each of your children shows fear. Some children will suck their thumbs; others will fidget. Tell your child that sometimes you get scared, too. Talk about how it feels in your body when you are scared. Your child will learn what being scared feels like. She will learn to tell you with his words when she is scared.

5. Help your children learn about the things that scare them. Knowing how things work makes them less scary. Read books about fire trucks and talk about why they have sirens. Talk about thunderstorms and lightning. Knowing why scary things happen can make them a little less scary.

6. Play with your children. Children express their feelings through their play. Play with dolls or puppets. Say, "Is the doll starting school? How is she feeling?" Read books about children who are scared. Pretend to be a firefighter. Playing helps children feel in control. When children draw, ask them to tell you about their pictures.

7. Notice when children are brave. Your children may do something that you know scares them. Tell them you are proud of them. Maybe they walked by a dog without crying. Say, "You were bold walking past that dog!" Maybe they slept without their nightlight. Tell them you noticed they are becoming brave.

8. Talk about how to be less scared. Ask your children what would help them be less afraid. Give them ideas. If TV scares them, maybe they should not watch scary TV shows. If they are scared of the dark, maybe sleeping with their teddy bear will help. Sometimes it helps to take some deep breaths. Asking your child for ideas is a good way for her to learn problem-solving skills.

Overall, have fun with your children. Play with them. Read to them. Play games with them. Play sports with them. Being active will help their bodies get rid of fear. Listen to their worries and fears. They will feel cared for. They will feel safe. When you spend time with them, they know you think they are important!

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