

How to Handle Fear

There is no doubt about it. Life can be scary at times for children. We cannot keep our children from everything they fear—nor should we even try, but we can help them learn ways to be brave. It is an important step to growing up.

1. Let your child know that you take their fears seriously.
2. Give your child truthful information on topics such as death or war, and let them know you are willing to answer any questions.
3. Encourage your child to confront the object of their fear, such as dogs, one step at a time at their own pace. For example, perhaps start with pictures, then try a very small, gentle dog that is tied up, so the child decides how close to get.
4. Allow your child some control. For example, if they are afraid of intruders, make shutting and locking their bedroom window one of their night-time responsibilities.
5. Daily routines and rituals give a child a sense of stability and security, and may ease general anxiety.

Source: ministrytoparents.com

Everyone, from the youngest child to the oldest adult, experiences anxieties and fears at one time or another. Feeling anxious in a particularly uncomfortable situation never feels very good. However, with children, such feelings are not only normal, they are also necessary. Dealing with anxieties can prepare young children to handle the unsettling experiences and challenging situations of life.

Young children can get spooked by just about anything — the dark, the wind, or even a favorite stuffed animal. Or they seem to sail through a real frightening situation, only to become afraid of something days or weeks later. No matter how scared your child gets, childhood fears are usually nothing to worry about. They are normal emotions that help your children figure out how the world works.

Monsters Under the Bed Understanding Kids' Fears



Helping your Child Through their Fears

Here are a few tips that will help your child deal with their fears - real and imaginary - and eventually overcome them.

- Try to understand your child's fear: Young children are still discovering the world they live in. Their imagination is developing, and hence, whatever they see/hear in real life can result in formation of scary mental images.

- Talk to your child: Talking to your child will definitely make him feel more comfortable. If your child is old enough, let him share his fear with you. Ask him to explain what it is that he is scared of and why. Let him explain how he feels. Show him your concern while he discusses his fear with you. Tell him how you were also scared of several things as a child. This empathy will definitely strengthen your bond with your child as he starts believing that you care and are concerned about his feelings.

- Give the right message: Don't send the wrong messages to your child by saying things like: "Stop being a Baby," "Don't be scared," "See, your friend is not scared," etc. This makes the child believe it is wrong to be scared and he/she will stop sharing his fears with you. Tell your child it is alright to be afraid. Also, explain that it is OK to share his fear and ask for help.

- Do not ignore their fear: If your child is scared of a particular relative, caregiver or a neighbor, do not ignore it or force the child to be with them. Instead, speak to your child about it, and let him explain what makes that person fearful. Even if you think that person is unlikely to cause any trouble to the child, ALWAYS give your child some benefit of doubt.

- Do not force your child to do something that he/ she is scared of. Forcing the child will only worsen his/ her fear. Allow your child to take his/ her own time to adjust and overcome his fears. Support him with all the love and care that you can.

- Model being brave: Ever heard the saying, "Actions speak louder than words"? If you freak out at something, chances are your child will react in the same manner. Your child believes if something or someone is safe for you, it is safe for him too.

- Keep children away from fearful characters: A young child cannot differentiate between reality and fantasy. Children do get scared of the fantasy characters that they watch on TV. Turn off the scary TV shows.

- Offer to walk with the child through the house/room/area that the child associates with fear. Open all the doors, look under the bed – use light to show that nothing is there. If your child is frightened by sounds or shadowy images, discuss what could actually be causing these sounds in a non-judgmental way.

- Reward brave behavior: It is not easy facing fears. Using rewards can encourage brave behavior. Children respond to praise and encouragement. For example, you can say: "You did it! You played at your friend's by yourself." "You did a great job of introducing yourself to the other kids!" and "I'm proud of you for sleeping in your own room." When your child is facing strong fears, it may be helpful to use specific rewards as motivation to achieve.

Final Thoughts

Although helping your child face his fears may be tough at times, it is important to understand that fear is essential for survival. It helps us escape dangerous situations. But if your child's fears keep him from engaging in everyday activities, it may be time to seek help from other parents you trust or from professionals. Some children's fear systems are much more sensitive than others. Anxious children may be trapped in a whirlwind of fearful thoughts and paralyzed by nagging "what if's." According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 13 percent of children are affected by anxiety disorders which include phobias, panic disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Talk with your pediatrician or school psychologist if your child's fears are overwhelming you and your child.