



Children's Fears

Fears are a normal part of childhood and are typical at certain ages. Fear is real to your child which means that it needs to be taken seriously. Like adults, when children feel a sense of control they are less fearful. Some fears develop with independence. For example, when a child begins to walk and understands she can leave mom, she realizes mom can leave as well. A child's surroundings

can increase fears-unfamiliar places, crowds, shadows from night lights, etc. Sometimes a child's fear is based on a lack of knowledge. "The water goes down the drain, so I might disappear down the drain."

Often, a child's fears are the same as the parent's. Fears can be increased by a parent's reaction or comments. For example, if a parent screams at

the sight of a spider, the child will likely do the same. Children take what you say literally-"The policeman will get you if you don't stay in your car seat," or when a stranger says, "You're so cute that I'm going to take you home with me." Be careful about referring to death as sleep because this may cause children to be afraid to go to sleep.

Most Common Early Childhood Fears

6 months	Stranger anxiety
8 months	Separation from parent, falling
1 year	Separation from parent, noises, animals, bath, doctor
2 years	Separation from parent, toilet training, bath, bedtime, doctor
3 years	Loss of parent, toilet training, bedtime, monsters and ghosts, anyone who looks different than family, e.g., disability, beard, different skin color, etc.
4 years	Noises, animals, bedtime, monsters and ghosts, people who look different than family, loss of parent, death, divorce
5 years	Noises, animals, monsters and ghosts, getting lost, going to daycare, loss of parent, death, injury, divorce

Chart adapted from *When Your Child Is Afraid* by Schachter & McCauley

What to avoid when dealing with your child's fears...

- Try not to tell your child that she will be a "big girl" when she overcomes the fear. This puts too much pressure on her.
- Offer understanding of the fear. For example, say, "Loud noises, like thunder, can be scary."
- Provide helpful information about the feared item or situation. "Dogs bark because that is how they 'talk'

and sometimes they bark a lot when they are happy to see someone."

- Read a special book, like *There's a Nightmare in My Closet* by Mercer Mayer, and talk about the feared object or situation.
- Help your child approach fears at her own pace, which will probably be slow. For example, allowing her to decide when to put her face under water when swimming gives her a sense of control and less fear.

- Closely monitor what your child watches on TV. Many programs and movies are too intense for young children and may encourage fear.

Helping children when they get shots...

Getting shots can be scary and painful. Children can feel less fear and pain if they are treated in a positive and comforting way before, during

and after a shot. To make things easier for yourself:

- Be honest with your child. Shots hurt, but only for a minute.
- Listen and acknowledge her feelings.
- Offer to comfort her to help her cope with the fear of getting a shot.

- Offer hugs and encouraging words before, during and after a shot.

Overall, fears are real to children. **DO NOT** expect her fears to go away overnight, shame her or force her to face the fear. Assist her by

using the suggestions provided. Sometimes parents need help and getting that help is a sign of strength. Call your county health department and ask for a Child Guidance professional.

Child Guidance... Where Families Find Solutions



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