

“Fear”

The Bible says, “Do not fear, for I am with you... Isaiah 41:10 (NIV). Do you have a child who's scared of the dark? Has an irrational fear of water? Totally loses it when a dog comes anywhere near them? Screams at the sight of a bug on the path? Before you start to worry that these fears indicate there's something 'wrong' with your child, rest assured childhood fears such as these are a completely normal part of development. Ultimately, learning to deal with fear is an important life lesson. More often than not, our kids' fears aren't entirely rational but what they're feeling, along with their physiological reaction to it, is very real indeed.

Take comfort in the fact your child will most likely grow out of these fears. In the meantime, here are some things you can do to help your child deal with their fears:

1. Be patient.

Don't force your child to confront their fears before they're ready. Remember, while the fear may be totally mystifying to you, it's still very real to them. Instead, be patient, empathetic and let them confront their own fears at their own pace. Talk them through the emotion they're feeling in a calm and comforting manner.

2. Introduce role models.

Childhood fears are common and for this reason there are a plethora of resources out there to assist you in teaching your child how to deal with them. Seek out age-relevant children's books, toys and movies with characters and storylines that deal with overcoming fears.



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3. Lead by example.

Do you have a fear of your own? Perhaps you're afraid of heights or don't like being stuck in crowds ... Sometimes the best way to teach your child how to overcome their fear is to be honest and share with them how you deal with your own fear.

4. Give them control.

Fear can be a direct response to feeling physically threatened and helpless. Children who are afraid of dogs are worried they're going to get bitten; little ones who are terrified of the monster under the bed are feeling vulnerable on their own in the dark ... Giving your child an element of control in the management of their fear will go a long way towards making them feel safe. For example, if they are afraid of intruders in the night, make shutting and locking their bedroom window one of their night-time responsibilities that you may do together.

5. Encourage and praise.

Dismissing your child's fears or teasing them will achieve absolutely nothing positive. Belittling or ignoring your child may force them to internalize their fear rather than deal with it and also break their trust in you. Instead, talk to your child about their fears, reassure them that you are there for them, and encourage them to deal with their fears in their own way - and in their own time. It's also important to praise their efforts - even make up a 'certificate' to give them when they do something out of their comfort zone. It will go a long way towards building their confidence and overcoming their fears.



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6. Answer their questions.

Although childhood fears are usually based on imaginary or exaggerated perceptions, that doesn't mean they aren't very real to your child. Talk with them about their fears and try and understand where they're coming from. Encourage your child to ask you any questions they like and do your best to answer them in gentle, age-appropriate ways. If you don't know all the answers, research them together at the library or online.

7. Stay calm.

It's never a pleasant experience for a parent to witness their child in a state of distress and sometimes parents may feel helpless in the face of it. Responding angrily or with humor will often result in further distress for your child. Remaining calm and consistent will ensure a quicker resolution. When your child is in a state of fear, they're not able to discuss the issues reasonably. Just be there to soothe and comfort.

8. Little steps.

You can help your child conquer their fear by gentle exposure to that fear, which gradually increases with time and practice. You can do this in consultation with your child. For example, if he's afraid of the bath, you can start by having a small amount of water in the bath, then gradually add more. Use a jug to pour a little on his hands, then progress to pouring a little on the back of his neck. Keep taking small steps until he feels comfortable and confident.



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9. Pray about it.

Teach your child to talk to God about their fears. Assure them that He is with them and He cares!

Reference

Matthews, K. (2020). 8 Ways to Help Your Child Overcome Their Fears. Downloaded from: <https://www.kidspot.com.au/parenting/child/child-behaviour/8-ways-to-help-your-child-overcome-their-fears/news-story/d99f1c3fbbdec2a987ee1084e450de05>



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