

# FEARS

Many children have fears that surface at various times in their lives

Some fears, such as fear of the dark, are common in children at certain ages.



Sometimes fears are triggered by an event or an unfortunate accident. If a child is bitten by a dog when young, he or she may be afraid of all dogs. Well-publicised tragedies can lead to a deep feeling of fear and anxiety about their personal safety.

Children can also learn fears from adults. The number of children who fear a trip to the dentist, just from their parents' reactions, is a source of consternation to that profession. However, parents can help their children deal with fears and the following suggestions may be useful:

## COPING WITH FEARS

**HERE ARE SOME IDEAS YOU CAN USE TO HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH FEARS:**

**1. Distinguish between caution and fear.** Caution is the recognition of possible dangers and the consideration of ways of dealing with them safely. Fear can be debilitating as it generally leads to an avoidance of a situation and it diminishes the ability to cope.

**2. Affirm their fears.** Let them know that it is okay to be scared or nervous about meeting a new group or friends or giving a speech at school. By encouraging children to give voice to their fears we teach them to share their problems rather than keep them to themselves.

**3. Reassure them by telling them the truth.** You cannot guarantee that a child will be totally safe but there are steps to take to reduce the likelihood of harm. Children's sense of security comes from routines and established rituals, so make sure that there are as few changes as possible in their lives particularly following a trauma.

**4. Teach them some skills to cope.** Often children take solace in action, so give them ideas on how they might beat their fears. Children

who are afraid of the dark often feel better knowing that they can turn on a night-light if needed.

**5. Display confidence in your child's ability to deal with their fears.** Without being dismissive help children view the positive side of events and show your faith in their ability to cope. Just as children easily pick up parental anxiety they also learn optimism from their parents. It is amazing how catching a positive attitude is!

**6. Find someone to talk to about your children's fears.** Swap ideas to reassure yourself that you have acted in your child's best interests. As parents we can feel like we are in the dark at times when children express their concerns to us. Working out what's normal and what's not normal is a key to effectively helping children when they have problems.

  
**Parenting** *ideas*  
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