



Child Builders

Houston's Advocates for Mental Health in Children

Facts about Children's Fears

Source of information: MCH Early Childhood Development & Parent Education Program

Facts about children's fears

- Like adults, when children feel a sense of control they have less fear.
- Fears are a normal part of childhood. Certain fears are typical at certain ages.
- Fear is real to your child, so take your child's fears seriously.
- Some fears develop with independence. For example, when a child begins to walk and understands he can leave mom, he realizes mom can leave him as well.
- A child's surroundings can increase fears, such as 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 his 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 probably do the same.
- Children take what you say literally, such as, "The policeman will get you if you don't get in your car seat," or when a stranger says, "You're so cute I'm going to take you home with me." Be careful about referring to death as sleep—children may be afraid of going to sleep.

How to help your child with fear

- Offer understanding of fear. For example, "Loud noises, like thunder, can be scary."
- Provide helpful information about the feared item or situation.
- Read a special book and talk about the feared object or situation.
- Help your child approach fears at his own pace, which will probably be slow. For example, allowing a child to decide when to put his face under water when swimming gives him a sense of control and less fear.
- Closely monitor what your child watches on television. Many programs and movies are too intense for young children and may encourage their fears.

What to avoid when dealing with child's fears

- DO NOT expect your child's fear to go away over night.
- DO NOT shame your child for his fears.
- DO NOT force your child to face his fears. This approach will make the situation worse. For example, if your child is afraid of dogs, forcing him to pet a dog will frighten him even more. Try not to tell your child that they will be a "big boy" or "big girl" when they overcome their fear. This puts too much pressure on the child.

ChildBuilders (formerly known as HAMIC), founded in 1974, is a non-profit organization that provides innovative programs to educate parents, children, teachers and the community about the emotional well-being of children and their families. www.childbuilders.org ChildBuilders Community Education.

For further information & referral
call your child's school counselor

DePelchin Children's Center	713-730-2335
ESCAPE Family Resource Center	713-942-9500
Harris County Psychiatric Center	713-741-5000
Jewish Family Service	713-667-9336
Mental Health Association	713-522-5161
MHMRA of Harris County	713-970-7070
NAMI Metro Houston	281-579-3750
United Way of Texas Gulf Coast	211 or 713-957-4357

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