

Children's Fears



Fears are a normal part of childhood and are typical at certain ages.

Most Common Early Childhood Fears

6 months	Stranger Anxiety.
8 months	Separation from parent, falling.
1 year	Separation from parent, noises, animals, bath, healthcare provider.
2 years	Separation from parent, toilet training, bath, bedtime, healthcare provider.
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

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 they can leave mom, they realize that 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.

What to Avoid When Dealing with Your Child's Fears

- Try not to tell your child that they will be a "big kid" when they overcome the fear. This puts too much pressure on them.
- 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 them to decide when to put their face under water when swimming gives them 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 their feelings.
- Offer to comfort your child to help them 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 their fears to go away overnight, shame them or force them to face the fear. Assist them 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.



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