



# Children's Fears

*How you can help*

## You & Your Child

A guide for  
new parents

A dark room, a monster in the closet, flushing water. The world can be a scary place for a child.

Children are fearful of many things.

- Two-year-olds are often afraid of the toilet, especially the flushing water.
- Three-year-olds are often afraid of dogs and other animals.
- Four- and 5-year-olds often fear the dark.
- Children ages 6 and older may fear imaginary creatures, robbers, and death.

### ***About your child's fears***

Some fears may seem silly to you. But they can be very real to your child.

Very young children may be afraid of the toilet because it is loud, things disappear in it and never return, and they can't control it.

Children who are 4 or 5 years old may be afraid of the dark because they can't see what is in a dark room, for example, but they can imagine a monster and assume that what they can't see can hurt them.

## **ON BACK**

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR  
CHILD OVERCOME HIS OR HER  
FEARS



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# HOW YOU CAN HELP

## *Don't laugh or tease your child for being afraid of something*

Being afraid of the toilet may seem silly to you, but it is a very real fear for your child.

Laughing or teasing doesn't help children overcome their fears. It may only worsen what is already an unpleasant experience for them.

## *Comfort your child*

Hold and hug your child. Say, "I understand. It's okay."

Try to put your child's mind at ease. Assure your child that whatever he or she is afraid of is not dangerous.

For example, if an imaginary creature is the scary thing, say something like, "I know you are worried. There are no monsters in your closet."

## *Help your child explore what he or she is afraid of*

When your child is calm, slowly and cautiously help him or her explore what they are afraid of. For example:

- Hold your child. Both of you watch the toilet flush. When you think the time is right, let the child flush, so he or she can control it.
- When an animal is around, hold your child. Teach your child how to deal with the animal. With dogs, tell the child the dog's name. Hold the dog and let your child touch or pet its back. Teach your child how to greet a dog and what not to do when a dog is around.
- Use a night light in dark rooms.
- Hold your child's hand when going into a dark room.
- Give your child a flashlight at night.



# WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CHILD HAS TROUBLE GOING TO BED

## *Understand that things children see and hear may scare them*

Children sometimes see things in their neighborhood or on television that might worry or scare them, like fighting, shooting, accidents, and monsters.

## *Try to see a child's fear from his or her point of view*

Children usually love animals. But a dog can be scary when it jumps up and licks a child on the face or pins a child to a wall with its paws.

Remember, a dog may be as big as your child. If you came across a dog bigger than you, wouldn't you be a little fearful?

- Preschool children have many fears. This is normal.
- Some fears may seem silly to you, but they can be very real to your child.
- It helps to be afraid of some things because they can be dangerous. Wandering around in the dark, fighting, and some kinds of animals can be dangerous to a child. You should teach your child what to be wary of and what not to be afraid of.
- Most fears of young children go away as they get older. Children over age 6 have fewer fears, and the fears they do have are different and more realistic – they may fear unusual animals, like snakes; they may be afraid of storms or natural disasters; and they may be afraid of getting injured.
- Contact your doctor if your child's fears interfere with doing typical things, such as going to school or staying with a babysitter.

