

“Helping Children with Fears and Anxieties”

Numerous parents seek support to help their children manage anxieties and worries. Scary things do happen. We can't protect our kids from uncertain events but we can help by giving “tools” to empower children so they can manage their fears and worries. Here are some helpful tips from Michelle Borba's article, *“How to Help Children Manage their Fears and Anxieties - Ten Helpful Tips”*.

1. Teach children to monitor scary media consumption

Images from movies, video games, music, news stories and websites can trigger fears or make them even worse. Images from movies, video games, music videos, Internet websites, and even television news stories can trigger fears or make them even worse. Try to monitor your child's media exposure and be especially particular about what your child watches closer to bedtime. Also, teach your children to use the remote to turn off something that is troubling them. “This is scary. I don't need to watch it” is a great line for kids to learn to say. Doing so will help our kids learn how to monitor their own media diets.

2. Share worries as a family

Encourage your child to talk about his fears. Putting a worry into words makes the more manageable. Your goal is to “catch” her worries early before they blow out of proportion and become full-fledge fears so be sure your children knows you will listen. You can then not only reassure your children but also clarify any misconceptions and answer questions. Also talk about your feelings as a family—it will be more natural and kids will know it's “ok” to open up because you are discussing your concern.

3. Provide calm support

Help your children feel safe. When your children confront a fear and hears you comforting them with, “It will be okay,” (or gets the same message from a parent holding their hand) they will feel more secure. Your words of support will become a model children can use themselves. Our children copy how we cope with our fears. So be the example of how to handle your own worries that you want your children to copy. Also, keep yourself strong. Fears are caught by children or passed down. Keep your worries or pessimism in check especially during a tragedy or after a trauma.

4. Help your child know what to expect

There are some fears that we can't protect our kids from and just must be endured. Educating your children about various events can clear up misperceptions as well as boost feeling of security. For instance, if your children worry about school safety, remind them that the school has a school safety plan. Let them know that the principal and teachers are trained in an emergency. Show the locks on the school doors that can be used in “lock down.” Describe how the whole community—mayor, police, fire department, doctors—know what to do in an emergency. Knowing what to expect – or realizing there is a safety plan in place that the child practices and rehearses can reduce that fear. Rehearse!

5. Read books that deal with the fear

Telling stories, acting out situations or reading books about a particular scary situation can help children overcome fears. This is helpful because children often identify with the character who shares the same anxiety: “Oh good! Somebody else feels the same way!” Kids are more likely to open up about their worries to you. Putting the fear into words can help reduce the child's concern. A few kid favorites include: *Wemberly Worried*, by Kevin Henkes, *Fears, Doubts, Blues and Pouts*, by Norman Wright, Gary J. Olver, and Sharon Dahl; *What To Do When You Worry Too Much*, by Dawn Huebner; *What To Do When You're Scared and Worried*, by James J. Christ; *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak; *There's a Nightmare in My Closet* by Mercer Mayer; and *Go Away, Big Green Monster!* by Ed Emberley. Many of these are available in our school and local libraries.

6. Say fear-reducing self-statements

Teach your child to face the fear by helping her learn to say a positive phrase. It's best to help your child choose only one phrase and help her practice saying the same one several times a day until she can say to herself when feeling anxious. A few fear-reducers include: “I can do this.” “I can handle this.” “I will be OK.” “It's not a big deal.”

7. Ask for hugs!

When our children are troubled, our natural parenting instincts kick in - we hug them to try to comfort them. Research finds that our instincts are right! Hugs actually help reduce our kids' worries and calm them. University of Miami studies found massage, back rubs, and hugs are especially soothing and emotionally benefitting for children in trauma. Teach your children to say, “I need a hug!”

8. Use their imagination!

Capitalize on your child's vivid imagination. Instead of fearing the bad man or the monster help her conjure up an image of a knight in shining armor, an angel, or a super hero who comes to the rescue and chasing off the bad guys. Kids' imaginations can work to help reduce fears!

9. Put your child in the driver seat

Research shows that feeling as if you have some control over a situation helps reduce the worry. So empower your child by helping him develop his own fear-reducing plan. Start by identifying one fear.

Problem: “The weird shadows on my wall make me scared to sleep in the dark.”

“What might help need you feel safer?” Then brainstorm reasonable options until your child can find at least one thing that might help him feel more in control and then carry it out.

Kid-generated Solutions: “Tuck a flashlight under my pillow and move my bed away from the bookcase so I don't see the shadows on the wall.”

The truth is our world is unpredictable and uncertain. As much as we'd hope, we can't protect our children from what life offers. But we can help our children learn ways to manage their fears and reduce their anxieties. We can teach our kids coping strategies so they can use them to help them deal with whatever troubling event they encounter as well as boosting their resilience for life.

For more valuable tips on supporting your children, try visiting: <http://micheleborba.com/articles/>

Thank you to Kelly McLellan-Page at Springfield Heights School for sharing this information.