

CHILDREN'S FEARS & PHOBIAS



WHAT'S THE CHILDREN'S FEAR?



Novelty, unpredictability and sudden changes can also induce fear in children, and illness might 'put them back', reviving old fears that they had put behind them at an earlier age. Adults also teach children to fear certain things before the child has even come across them, through their words or actions. Children may also 'pick up' the fears of adults in their family. But children who have phobias at an early age usually develop into normal adults.

Young children have more fears and phobias than adults, and experience the emotion of them more intensely. Such fears may start and stop for little apparent reason as the child develops.

WHAT DO CHILDREN FEAR?

Age 2-4: fear of animals, loud noises, being left alone, inconsistent discipline, toilet training, bath, bedtime, monsters and ghosts, bed wetting, disabled people, death and injury.



Age 4-6: fear of darkness and imaginary creatures. Also animals, bedtime, monsters and ghosts. Other fears, such as of strangers seem to be persistent.



It has been suggested by some research that children between the ages of three and six sometimes confuse reality, dreams and fantasy.

Young children may also sometimes believe that inanimate or non-living objects have lifelike qualities. They may too have inaccurate concepts of size relationships (monsters that can come up through plug-hole for example).



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11 and 12 year-olds might fear animals, kidnapping, being alone in the dark and injections.
13 year-olds seem to fear heights as well as the three mentioned above.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF PHOBIA?

The level of symptoms that children with phobias experience varies a great deal, from very mild anxiety to very severe panic and terror. A mild degree of nervousness in particular situations is not usually a problem, but it is only a matter of degree, and at the other end of the scale there are children who have full-scale panic attacks when in the dreaded situation, and soon refuse to enter it altogether because of the terror that grips them at such times.



SOME SYMPTOMS

- * heart palpitations
 - * feeling sick
 - * chest pains
- * difficulty breathing
 - * dizziness
 - * 'jelly legs'
 - * feeling 'unreal'
- * intense sweating
 - * feeling faint
 - * dry throat
- * restricted or 'fuzzy' vision or hearing.



HOW CAN CHILDREN'S FEARS BE TREATED?

Persistent fears in children can be treated in much the same way as they are in adults; that is by desensitisation through being exposed to the feared situation. However, as children's fears are often volatile and transitory the child's previous record with fears should be considered before launching into an elaborate treatment programme.



With young children especially, practical activities that involve exposure could also be turned into a game, since most children respond better to play than to work.

Talking help

If this is the case, one technique suggested by Anxiety Care is to ask the child what he or she thinks a close friend would be feeling in this situation.

When the child resists support, it can become very difficult.



Where very negative thinking is involved, the parent can try to help by gently challenging the child's thought processes.

If the child refuses all help then the parent could usefully talk to a doctor or therapist without the child being present in order to learn ways to apply help at such time that the child is willing to accept it.

SCHOOL PHOBIA



Overcoming childhood fears

People should never make fun of child's fears, and should let him/her know that grown-ups, too, are sometimes afraid.



Give loving support and reliable limits. The child needs to know he / she is loved.



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