



Understanding and Responding to Fear

At this age, your child:

- Is fascinated by the world of pretend and imagination
- Doesn't fully understand the difference between fantasy and reality
- Might become especially fearful during changes/transitions
- Can seem especially fearful depending on their temperament (for example, high withdrawal, high sensitivity, low adaptability)

Suggestions for supporting your child in overcoming (developmental/innocent) fears:

- **Try not to tease (even in good humor), no matter how silly the fear might seem to you.** For example, a fear of shadows.
- **Don't argue about it.** Trying to convince your child out of it can prolong the fear and destroy trust.
- **Control your negative reaction the fear** For example, frustration or anger.
- **Empathize with your child.** Recognizing that something causes your child fear shows empathy and understanding, and opens the door to problem solving solutions.
- **Brainstorm (ideally with your child) strategies for handling the fear.** For example, putting a bellowed stuffed animal under the bed to guard against monsters, using a night light, or having pretend monster repellent spray.
- **Share stories of other children with similar fears that demonstrate ways of gaining courage or overcoming fears.** You can do this through books or stories from your own experiences.
- **Allow your child to feel in control of fearful situations.** For example, if your child agrees to put their toe in the swimming pool, they can trust you won't push them in further.
- **Be sensitive and patient.**
- **Create/provide safe experiences for your child to take small steps in overcoming their fear.** In doing so, you allow your child the opportunity to enjoy activities they once were scared of in their own time (for example, dogs or swimming).