

OPENING HOURS

Monday, Tuesday & Friday in Toowoomba

Wednesday & Thursday in Pittsworth

After hours appointments available

Parenting Tips

Fears

Fears are a common experience for all children. Because all children are different, and have different experiences, their reactions to the same situation can and does vary. This is why some children fear things and others do not. Children should be encouraged to cope with fears that interfere with daily activities and prevent them from doing things that they enjoy.

So what is fear? Fear involves worrying about bad things that may happen. A common reaction to a fearful situation is to avoid that thing that is feared. When children fear something they may scream, cry or run to their parents for comfort. Common fears in young children include: fire and getting burnt, war, falling from high places, the dark, separation from parents, animals, 'bad' people etc. As children get older, social fears such as fear of criticism, embarrassment and rejection become more common and fears of physical harm tend to decrease. It is important to remember that some fears are realistic, such as fear of deep water, electricity or savage dogs. These fears help keep children safe.

Why do children have fears? Some children are more fearful than others; it may be part of their nature. Some fears are learned from experience, for example walking home from school and being confronted by a large, barking dog, may lead to development of a fear of all things associated with the dog; the child may develop a fear of all dogs or of walking home from school. Fear can develop if it is accidentally rewarded. For example, if a child shows fear when they need to go into a dark room, the parent may go with them, turn the light on, give lots of attention and reassurance, all of which inadvertently rewards and reinforces their fear.

As a parent what can you do?

It can take time for children to overcome their fears, especially if they have had the fear for a long time. You can help your child by teaching them how to cope with the unpleasant feelings caused by fear and by encouraging them to gradually approach the thing they fear.

Key steps to help your child:

- Talk with your child and tell them how you cope with your own fears.
- Try not to show fearful reactions.
- Teach your child coping strategies e.g. self-talk, breathing exercises, relaxation and imagination.
- Help your child to gradually face their fears.
- Remain calm when your child is scared or anxious.
- Praise your child for facing their fears (lots of praise is always good).
- Encourage your child to try new things.
- Do not let your child avoid things they must do.
- Have some rules that tell your child what to do in dangerous situations.
- Get other children to help your child feel comfortable in new situations.