

Helping Children When They Feel Afraid

Three principles for helping children with their fears are to *communicate*, *clarify*, and *comfort*. Consider the tips on these key concepts on pages 32–35 in the book. They will be useful in the following activity as well, and will help children learn to understand, face, and ask for help with their fears.

Facing Fears

Discussion: Explain that some things can be dangerous and that is why we have rules to stay away from these things. It is okay, even good, to be afraid of some things that can hurt us because it may help us be more careful or stay away. When discussing the following and other scenarios, remember that all fears seem real to the person who is afraid. Take care not to minimize these fears or cause children to feel that there is a problem if they are afraid of something. Let children know that you want to give them tools that can help.

Directions: Read a scenario aloud. Ask children pertinent questions, such as those listed in Levels 1 and 2. Consider the strategies for dealing with worries that are given in the book (see pages 20–25) and the possible strategies listed below when helping children answer what they could do.

Scenarios:

- You are nervous about a monster or ghost being in your bedroom at night.
- You feel afraid if you see a spider or a bee.
- You are worried when a neighbor walks a large dog near you.
- You feel frightened to have your teeth cleaned or to get a filling at the dentist.
- You feel scared to go swimming (if you haven't learned how).
- You feel uneasy about talking to adults you don't know.
- You are worried about getting a shot at the doctor's office.

Possible Strategies:

- **Relax.** Think about good things, play with a friend, sing songs, draw a picture, go to a quiet place, take deep breaths, read a book, take a walk, or tell yourself positive things like "I can do this" or "It will be okay."
- **Talk** about what is bothering you.
- **Ask questions** if you don't understand something.
- **Ask for help** when you need it.

Level 1

Read a scenario aloud. Ask: "Has something like this happened to you before? How did you feel? What did you do? Did someone help you? What did that person do? What can you do if this happens again?"

Level 2

Read a scenario aloud. Ask: "What if your friend or your younger brother or sister were afraid of this? What could you say or do?" (*As children focus on someone else, they can internalize the strategies for themselves as well.*)

Level 3

Let children role-play the listed scenarios or others that you have observed. Read a scenario aloud. Then have one or more children act out the scene. Review possible strategies. Ask the other children, "What can this child do to feel better? To get help?"