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# **How to Deal with Your Child’s Bedtime Fears**

Many children go through phases of having fears associated with nighttime and going to bed. These fears can take different forms, from the proverbial monster in the closet to the fear that parents may not be there when they wake up to a simple fear of the dark. If a fear is only occasionally expressed and is not interfering with your child’s sleeping habits, it’s nothing to worry about. However, some children can become more fearful over time and it begins to interfere with a smooth bedtime routine. Here are some suggestions to help your child deal with his or her nighttime fears.

**1. Take your child’s fears seriously.**

Don’t dismiss your child’s fears or tease them. Although this kind of fear can seem silly to an adult, they’re serious and real to your child. Your job as a parent is to help your child feel safe and protected, while also helping them develop confidence and coping skills. If your child talks about being afraid of something at bedtime, ask for details. Use open-ended questions and let them explain what they’re worried about.

**2. Once you understand the nature of the fear, let your child know that they’re safe.**

If the fear is separation anxiety, reassure your child that you’ll be there in the morning. Talk about the things that you’ll do together tomorrow to coax them to think about something positive and normal. If your child is fearful of something that is real even if it’s a remote possibility such as a fire or a tornado, remind them that there are smoke alarms in the house or that there are weather alerts to warn people about dangerous weather. Explain how you’re watching out for such things and will keep them safe no matter what.

If the fear is something imaginary, like monsters, talk your child through recognizing that monsters don’t exist in the real world. Ask them if they’ve ever seen a monster driving a car or riding a bicycle on the street or at school.

### **Though it’s tempting to demonstrate a lack of monster-presence by checking under the bed or giving your child pretend “monster spray”, this tactic can be confusing because it suggests that the monsters are real after all and that your child is responsible for defending themselves in the event that the monster makes an appearance.**

**3. Devise a bedtime routine that is calming and comforting, and stick to it.**

A bedtime routine needs to focus around leaving behind the excitements and activities of the day and getting mentally ready to rest. Separate bedtime from television or watching a movie, and don’t let your child watch anything that can return as frightening ideas when the lights go out.

Read bedtime stories that are light. Stay away from fairy tales or stories that have potentially frightening aspects like wicked witches or dragons. Other comforting rituals are to include a back or foot rub, saying goodnight to dolls or toys, or having a security object to sleep with, like a teddy bear or a special blanket.

Soft music can focus your child’s mind and distract them from frightening thoughts. Instrumental music or nature sounds played only at bedtime can become part of a nightly routine that signals their mind that it’s time to go to sleep.

4. **Take steps that will help reassure your child that you’re nearby and watching out for them.**

There are some basic things you can do to remind your child that you are nearby. A nightlight in the room or a hall light left on to keep the room from being completely dark can be comforting. Your child might prefer to have their door left open or tightly closed, and you should allow this if it helps them fall asleep rather than keeping them awake. A nursery monitor may also be helpful because it lets your child know that you’re listening to what’s going on in their room. While they might call out for reassurance several times, they will soon get used to the monitor.

5. **Talk about fears during daylight hours and suggest some coping skills that they can practice.**

Away from bedtime, take the opportunity to talk to your child about their nighttime fears when the fears feel less close and real. Teach them some things that they can do when they feel nervous or have trouble falling asleep, such as breathing deeply and slowly, progressively relaxing their body from toes to head, or imagining a place like a beach or a playground in detail.

With a little help and support from parents, most children leave their nighttime fears behind. However, if your child seems to be getting more afraid rather than less so, is having panic attacks, or has suffered a real-life trauma that may be driving his fears, you should consult with your pediatrician or a counselor for assistance.

These bedtime story books can be very useful in helping your child cope with fears surrounding bedtime:

[My Dragon Is Scared: 12 Rhyming Stories to Help With Toddler Fears – Perfect for Early Readers or to Read With Your Child at Bedtime](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00PCF0Q48/ref%3Das_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00PCF0Q48&linkCode=as2&tag=childdevelopme09&linkId=3E7J64WPNJI6XEOI)

[Monster in the window: childrens books, short bedtime story for kids with pictures about the fear of the dark.](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00RXXP8ZO/ref%3Das_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00RXXP8ZO&linkCode=as2&tag=childdevelopme09&linkId=JOX3G7XIBZXGJ6UC)

[Scary Night Visitors: A Story for Children with Bedtime Fears](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0945354258/ref%3Das_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0945354258&linkCode=as2&tag=childdevelopme09&linkId=CHINOLYY5PC4HLNT)

For children four and over, this audio program is great to calm fears and instill sleep.

[Indigo Dreams: Relaxation and Stress Management Bedtime Stories for Children, Improve Sleep, Manage Stress and Anxiety (Indigo Dreams)](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0970863349/ref%3Das_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0970863349&linkCode=as2&tag=childdevelopme09&linkId=5WDSYYWUG7UICOXM)

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