Dealing With Children’s Fear

What is it that grips your heart with fear? Even as parents, there is a struggle with situations and created things that set a person on edge with fear. Children are no different. God’s presence and Word have helped people throughout history to not be afraid. Parents and adults can share God’s promises to help comfort children with their fears.

What Do Children Fear?

Fears are an emotion to which we all are subject. It seems inborn, exhibited first in a newborn’s response to the possibility of falling. Fear sometimes is well-founded, while at other times there seems to be no rational or explainable reason for it. Parents may never know what triggers their children’s fear of strangers, of being away from parents or of any other situations that suddenly become overwhelmingly frightening to children. It is useless to tell a child, “There’s nothing to be afraid of!” You can calm his fears only if your explanation pinpoints and eliminates the reasons for your child’s fears.

What Causes Fear?

In dealing with your child’s fears, consider whether there are hidden factors. Try to discover what lies behind the fear you see or sense in your child. Look for the underlying causes, the root issues. Sometimes a fear is the projection of a deep emotional conflict, such as hearing angry arguments of parents or loved ones. Fear can be caused by an unsettling physical experience, such as getting lost at the shopping mall. Fears also result from watching inappropriate television, video or computer games, listening to frightening stories from books or even magazines that are within his reach; listen to or watch the news only when he is not there; ask the neighbor to leash his dog, etc. Encourage your child to express his feelings to you when he is fearful or troubled, and promise to always listen and help.

What Will Help?

How secure does your child feel in confiding his fears to you? He may need your help to express the things that trouble him. Listen closely to what your son or daughter is saying to you. Sometimes clues regarding fears can be discovered by listening to (and watching) your child at play. Make-believe conversations with dolls, invented games with friends or use of toys may reveal your child’s perspective regarding something he fears.

Memorize Scripture Verses

God’s words can give your child assurance. By teaching your son or daughter Bible verses about God’s protection and love, you help prepare them for some future fearful time – a time you may not be available. Repeating God’s promises of help and protection gives courage and comfort. Your child may enjoy having you highlight or underline the following verses in his own Bible. Help him look up these verses:

“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God” (Isaiah 41:10).
“For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you” (Isaiah 41:13).

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you” (Psalm 56:3).

“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid” (Isaiah 12:2).

■ Music

Introduce music as a remedy for fear. Help your child learn to sing hymns and worship songs filled with truths about God that will provide comfort in frightening times. (“Children of the Heavenly Father,” “How Strong and Sure My Father’s Care,” etc.) Sing a hymn or song, repeat a Scripture verse, and pray together each night or any time your child is afraid.

■ Bible Stories

Use Bible stories to teach how to deal with fear. Talk about Bible characters who were afraid but relied on God. Discuss the things that made them afraid and how God helped them. Remind your child of these favorite Bible stories and people when fearful times arise.

■ Prayer

Teach your child to pray about his fear. Pray with him, but encourage him to pray even when you are not there. Teach him to pray in advance, “Help me not to be afraid at the doctor’s office.” Teach him to pray at the moment of fear, “I am afraid right now, God. Help me to trust you.” Teach him to appreciate God’s answers, “Thank you, God, for making me brave today when I heard the thunder.” Because you cannot always be with your child when he is afraid, prayer is a particularly vital help for him.

One of the most important things you can do regarding your child’s fear is to pray for him. Pray against the terror that grips his heart and against the circumstances that cause his fear. Pray that your child will openly tell you about his fears. Pray your child senses God’s protection and presence in such a way as to alleviate his fear. Ask God to help you uncover the underlying cause for your child’s fear and give you the wisdom to eliminate the cause and clarify your child’s thinking.