

# Preschooler Fear and Anxiety

Three and four year olds have many new experiences. And it's common for them to be fearful. They are starting to think and reason in new ways, and may develop new fears.

## Preschoolers may be fearful of:

- Real things: Bugs, the dark, or new people
- Imaginary things: Monsters or ghosts
- New experiences: New food, a new bed, a new house, or a new school
- Things they hear about: A flood or fire, an accident, or getting sick/hurt

It can feel overwhelming as a parent to know what to do when your child is fearful or anxious. Know that you're not alone, and it's common for children to have these feelings. Although it is common for children to have fears, it is important for them to have support. They don't know how to handle these feelings on their own yet. If your child is left to deal with anxiety on their own, repeatedly, for an extended period of time, it could lead to toxic stress. This has a negative impact on your child's brain health.

In the Alberta Health Services book: The Early Years, it outlines what you can do to support your child with fear and anxiety (Pg. 401-402).

## Provide Warmth:

- Be patient. Give your child time to process their fear.
- Let them be close to you. They may want to be held, or sit next to you.
- Do not make fun of them. Remember that their feeling is valid.
- Reassure them. Talk to them calmly, and let them know you are there, and they are safe.
- Listen to them. Encourage your child to talk about their fears.
- Do not force your child into a situation they fear.

## Provide Structure

- Talk to your child ahead of time, before going into a new situation. This will give them time to mentally prepare.
- Remind them of how well they handled a fear in the past.
- Give them information. If your child is afraid of lady bugs, explain to them that lady bugs are harmless and won't hurt them.
- Show your confidence. Your child copies your behaviour. Model confidence even when you are afraid.

Remember to be patient. Your child may still be fearful about something for months, years, or the rest of their life. The most important thing, is for them to feel supported and loved by

# Preschooler Fear and Anxiety

you. If you are concerned that your child is overly fearful or anxious, talk to your family doctor.

Home Visitor: Taylor Zaharchuk