



How Healthy is Fear?

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Fear is Normal

All children experience fear. As children grow and development cognitively, the fears change. Young children may fear the dark or taking a bath. Older children may fear being separated from their parent, being socially rejected, new situations or their parent's divorce. Aversions end or change as we grow older while some are correlated with new situations (going to a new school, welcoming a new sibling, moving, etc.) while others are triggered due to a previous negative experience (fear of water or being chased or bitten by a dog).

Ignoring a fear or calling

it "silly" only makes your child feel worse. Listen to your child's concerns and acknowledge why he may feel the way he does. Discuss how fears can be overcome and ways to conquer the trepidation instead of avoiding it all together. Point out how fears change overtime. If your child was scared of monsters when she was four, point out how she seems to think the idea of monsters is funny now. Offer support and reassurance.

If fear begins to interrupt daily activities to the point that your child is distracted, or you believe fear "paralyzes" your



Overreacting to your child's fear only reinforces your child's reaction.. (Keep Kids Healthy, 2009)

child in given situations, you may need to seek out a school counselor or other form of professional assistance. Common fears left unaddressed could potentially escalate into a phobia.

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Special points of interest:

- ♦ School bus challenges.
- ♦ The added pressure of test taking.
- ♦ Do you want your child to be fearless?
- ♦ How do you know when fear is out of hand?
- ♦ Healthy attitudes.
- ♦ Presenting in front of others.

The School Bus

School buses are a transportation solution for many parents, easing the burden of scheduling and time constraints. However, school buses are often a source of a child's uneasiness. Children are frequently surrounded by noise, chaos

and older kids. Some children can not see outside the window and they may fear missing their bus stop. Older children often bully younger ones by teasing them or taking their backpack. Is this any surprise? After all, there

is one adult present on the bus and his primary focus is on driving safely.

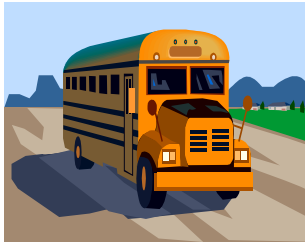
If your child fears riding the bus, ask her to explain what a "typical" day on the bus is like.

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The School Bus (continued)

Envisioning the bus ride through your child's eyes may be the first step in helping him. Here are some bus tips that may help with the riding experience:

*Drive the bus route several times prior to asking your child to ride the bus. Point out "landmarks" that will be easily recognized – a house, a sign or billboard, a business or restaurant. When your child sees these landmarks, he knows it is close to



School buses are noisy places!

home. If your child is young and can't see out the window, locate tall signs or a water tower that is more readily visible from the seat.

*Some bus drivers have assigned seating. Encourage your child to sit as close to the front as possible. If your child is

assigned to the back of the bus and is being bullied, ask the bus driver to have your child moved to a different seat, preferably closer to the driver.

*If your child must travel for long periods of time, make sure he has something to occupy the time. Crossword puzzles, word searches and tic-tac-toe are games your child may do alone or with someone seated next to her. Some bus drivers allow head phones for music. If your child enjoys reading, encourage him to keep a book in his backpack.

*Children are often hungry when school ends. Pack a snack for the bus ride home. A granola bar is easy to eat and your child can place the wrapper in her backpack.

Test Anxiety

For some students, test anxiety is accompanied with physical symptoms such as an upset stomach or headache. By offering patience and support, you can help your child overcome serious test anxiety symptoms (eHow, 2009).

*Encourage your child to do "their" best. For some this might be an A, for others a B.

*Practice creating questions with multiple answers before your child takes a test. Prior practice, and suc-

"While having to take a test isn't the end of the world, to many children it might actually feel that way."
(eHow, 2009)

cess, will make your child feel more confident and prepared.

*Make "no last minute cramming" a rule!

*Avoid "stinking thinking." Stay

positive. If I study I'll do well! Picture yourself knowing the answers...you are relaxed, calm and confident.

*Practice taking deep breaths and relaxing. Encourage your child to put their pencil down, stretch and close their eyes for 3-5 seconds before reading the test.

*Breakfast is very important, especially when your brain is asked to work hard! Don't skip meals!

The Benefits of Fear

We want our children to fear some things. We teach our children from a young age to fear strangers if they offer us candy or ask us to follow them. We teach our children to fear cars when crossing parking lots or busy streets. In these situations, we teach children precautionary measures and to fear the results; we are not encouraging an over-all fear of cars or strangers. Fear can be con-

sidered healthy as it prompts us to be more alert or to apply ourselves more. For example, if we fear we may fail the test if we do not study, the same fear will prompt us to study and apply ourselves. When fear is placed in a



Healthy doses of fear keep our children out of harm's way. (Child Development & Parenting Information, 2009)

healthy perspective, it is to our benefit.

How Much is “Too Much?”

We want our children to be successful and try their best. Most children may want straight A's but if they have a B, they are okay. Other children are perfectionists. They must have 100% on graded school work, assignments turned in not only on time, but often earlier than asked for and have perfect attendance. Perfectionism may be sought in areas of style, wanting to look exactly like a model or other admired individual. With activities,



Perfectionism:
When Straight A's
Are Not Good
Enough
(About Our Kids,
2009)

a child who is a perfectionist may expect to play a band instrument flawlessly or win every game. Children who must have success at every turn “often feel frustrated or dissatisfied with their performance, which puts them at risk for serious problems such as anxiety, depression, or eating disorders” (About Our Kids, 2009). In order to help your child, you must first understand what is driving the desire. Is it self-imposed? “These children set exceptionally high standards for them-

selves regardless of the opinions of their teachers, parents, or friends” (About Our Kids, 2009). The desire may only come about in situations where others are aware or only in circumstances where the work will be viewed by others. “These children may believe that if they are not perfect, they will lose the respect of their parents or teachers” (About Our Kids, 2009). If you feel your child is obsessed with perfectionism, begin challenging these thoughts by providing more rational interpretations (About Our Kids, 2009).

Healthy Habits

Parents often ask how they can monitor their child's study habits or how to determine if their child is putting forth their best effort. The following guidelines are recommended by the University of Texas (Connect with Kids, 2009):

*Set obtainable and reasonable goals.

*Observe the value in the “process” – not just the outcome.

*Accept failed attempts and disappointment without becoming de-

pressed or overly discouraged.

*Is not hindered by the fear of failure; the value of the attempt outweighs the consequences of failure.

*Mistakes are viewed as opportunities to learn and grow.

*Accept criticism without becoming overly defensive or angry.

If your child is depressed or overly anxious, ask yourself and them if the expectation is impossible. If it's

Fear of failure is healthy as long as it does not interfere with setting new goals.

not, what is there to fear? What is the worst thing that could possibly happen if you don't make an A, win the game or have perfect attendance? Help your child recognize the lessons learned by not being perfect at every turn.

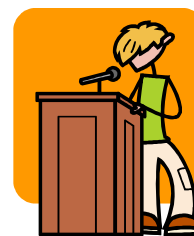
Speaking in Front of Others

What if I mess up? What if the kids laugh at me? What if I forget what I was going to say? These are common fears expressed by students. To help your child with a classroom presentation, keep the following in mind:

*Prepare! Place everything you will need in one location to avoid forgetting something important.

*Practice! Watch yourself in the mirror, making frequent eye contact. Practice alone in a corner (your voice will echo!) or with your family.

*Plan! Outline your speech or presentation on note cards. Refer to the cards as needed and be confident that if you forget something or lose your place, you have a safety net.



People fear looking foolish in front of others.

*Peers! Your friends are just as nervous as you are. Begin by telling a funny story or interesting experience that ties in with your presentation. This will relax you and your audience.

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Daphne Morris, M.Ed., met Trevor Romain in 1992 when he visited a school as a guest speaker. Impressed by Trevor's profound and meaningful impact on students, Daphne joined The Trevor Romain Company in 2006. A former elementary school principal, Daphne holds two Master's degrees in education.

July Q&A

Q: My child refuses to go to school. What can I do?

Some students look forward to school, others dread it and some feel a combination of excitement and anxiety. A U-M study found that "as many as 5% of children have expressed some sort of prolonged 'school refusal'" (University of Michigan, 2009). Discuss why your child refuses to go to school, asking for reasons other than "I just don't want to go!" Fear often has roots in situations in our outside of the home, such as divorce, a new sibling, friends, school assignments, school transportation, or bullying. Dr. Kees, a clinical assistant professor of psychiatry, states that "a vicious cycle often emerges, where a child feels anxious about going to school, the parent feels badly for the child and allows him to stay home. The next day, it becomes even more difficult for the child to go to school" (University of Michigan, 2009). If the root cause is not addressed, school anxiety can get out of control. Talk with your child's teacher and school counselor, openly working with the fear and how to deal with it.



Resources:

About Our Kids. "Perfectionism: When Straight A's Are Not Good Enough." http://www.aboutourkids.org/files/articles/english_parent_letter_nov_04.pdf (accessed June, 2009).

Amazing Moms. "Back to School Tips: Top 10 Back to School Jitters and Easy Solutions." <http://www.amazingmoms.com/htm/bts.top10.htm> (accessed June, 2009).

Child Development & Parenting Information. "Helping Your Child Deal with Fears & Phobias." <http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/disorders/fears.htm> (accessed June, 2009).

Connect with Kids. "Academic Pressure." http://www.connectwithkids.com/tipsheet/2008/400_aug27/thisweek/080827_pressure.shtml (accessed June, 2009).

eHow. "How to Help Your Child Overcome Test Anxiety." http://www.ehow.com/how_4892884_child-overcome-test-anxiety.html (accessed June, 2009).

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University of Michigan. "Mom, dont' make me go back to school!" <http://www.med.umich.edu/opm/newspage/2006/hmschoolanxiety.htm> (accessed June, 2009).