



HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH

Nightmares & Bedtime Fears

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We are seeing more cases and school reports of children having nightmares and anxiety. This is due to some recent films released, such as 'Chucky' and 'It'. While some children have watched the movies, others who have not may have discussed movies like these with their friends. Unfortunately, there is no fast way to get 'rid' of these fears but there is way to help your child deal with it better. Depending on the age of the child, you will approach it slightly differently.

10 WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

- 1. Mindset:** Know that your job as a parent is not to protect your child but to coach him/her to be able to be able to protect themselves. Remain calm and see this as a coaching opportunity.
- 2. Listen & Reassure:** Listen to your child and assure him/her that they are safe. Let them talk about it without cutting them off and don't dismiss it as being 'silly'. Tell them they are safe and it was just a bad dream.
- 3. Security Object:** It could be Dad's shirt, a cape, or a stuffed toy. Whatever the object, it creates a sense of comfort and safety. They can sleep with it every night.
- 4. Environment:** Create a calm, soothing environment for your child a couple of hours before bedtime. This could include: Taking a warm bath, not reading any disturbing books at bedtime, putting lavender oil on their pillow case, having relaxing music and/or a nightlight. Avoid using electronics 2 hours before bedtime, as it delays the release of melatonin and kids entering slow wave sleep.
- 5. Teach Relaxation Techniques:** During their waking hours, have them practice deep breathing, mindfulness meditation, body scans, and/or progressive muscle relaxation. This way, when they have a nightmare they can bring their sympathetic system back to calm, faster.
- 6. Externalize:** During their waking hours, you can ask them to draw the monster or their fear. Name the "fear" - they can call it anything. Have them close their eyes, and imagine the fear getting smaller and smaller until it disappears. With the fear externalized, they can access their courage faster, talk to it and manage it.
- 7. "Safe Space" Guided Imagery:** The mind doesn't know the difference between thought and reality. Just like the scary dream was very real and fear-inducing, a safe place can be very real and calming. Teach your child the 'safe place' exercise. During their waking hours, have them think of a place where they were happiest and safest. Have them describe the place with all their senses. Some choose to draw the safe place also and hang it their room as a cue or reminder. When they wake up with a bad dream, you can take them to their happy space in detail. They will immediately feel safer.
- 8. Walk Away:** Teach your child to walk away when kids are discussing scary things. Validate that he will be curious, but if it feels uncomfortable, he should walk away.
- 9. Psychologist:** Today it's a monster, tomorrow it will be a boss- fears will be a part of our life. Helping your child understand and manage their fears, learn coping skills, and boost their EQ would be the best investment to help them cope with all of their fears - now and in the future.
- 10. Manage Media:** Follow the media ratings, and don't allow your child to watch scary or disturbing content. Your child does not have the cognitive capacity to understand that what they're watching is not real (that's why they have media ratings). They will experience it like a traumatic event and process it the same way.



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