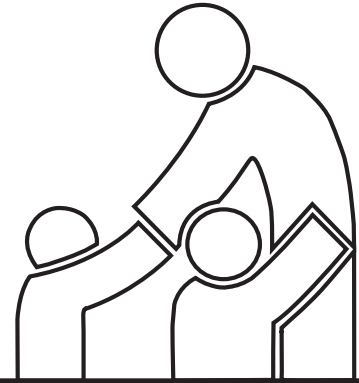


# Family Times

## NEWSLETTER



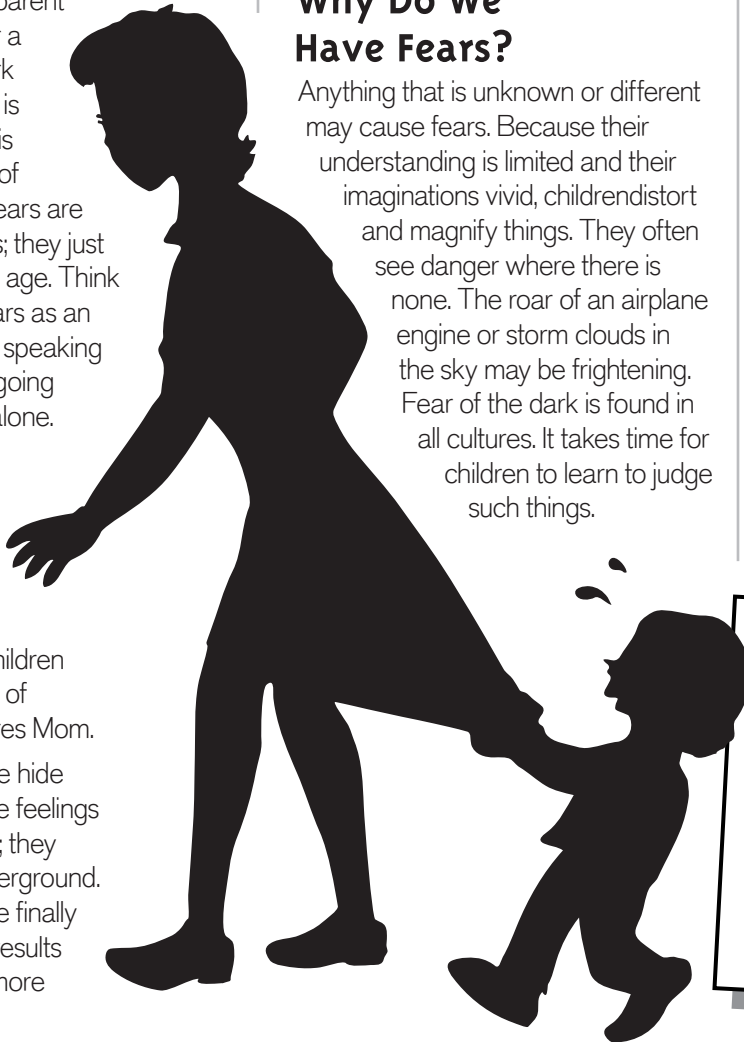
A NEWSLETTER FOR ADULTS WITH CHILDREN AGES 5-8

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### Fears and Feelings

Some feelings like fear help keep us safe and protect us from foolish actions. Fear is nature's way of alerting us to react to danger.

Young children worry. It may be thunder, a parent dying, bugs, or a torn homework paper. The list is endless. Fear is a natural part of growing up. Fears are always with us; they just change as we age. Think about your fears as an adult – fear of speaking to a group or going to a meeting alone. Often, neither children nor adults can explain why they are afraid. Remember, children are often afraid of whatever scares Mom. Sometimes we hide feelings. These feelings don't go away; they simply go underground. When they are finally released, the results are often far more



damaging than if the feelings had been expressed early on. It's hard for children to deal with feelings. They don't know how to identify and talk about fears or cope with them.

### Why Do We Have Fears?

Anything that is unknown or different may cause fears. Because their understanding is limited and their imaginations vivid, children distort and magnify things. They often see danger where there is none. The roar of an airplane engine or storm clouds in the sky may be frightening. Fear of the dark is found in all cultures. It takes time for children to learn to judge such things.

### Real or Silly?

A child's fears may seem ridiculous or silly to an adult. They are very real to the child. Parents may tell children not to worry or tell them they are being silly. A child does not have the life experiences an adult does, and fearful situations are truly a worry for many children. Many children under age 5 or 6 are scared of clowns. Fear of going down the drain with the water is real to a young child. Don't laugh at, minimize, judge, or ridicule your child's fears.

### What Are Feelings and Actions?

Children (and adults) need to learn that feelings are different from actions. Feelings are always okay. They are never right or wrong. Expressing feelings by hitting is wrong.

### To Make a Difference

- Learn what is causing his fears.
- Ask your child how she feels.
- Understand his feelings are real.
- Help her deal with fears in small steps.
- Reassure your child.



## The Book Nook

*There's a Nightmare  
in My Closet*

by Mercer Mayer is a good  
book to read with your child.

## How Do Growth Stages Affect Fears?

As children grow they will have fears that are normal and right on schedule. Children go through the growth stages at different ages. Some children are early developers and others late.

Children may be self-confident one moment and fearful the next. Be aware of children's differences. One child may jump in the pool immediately. Another may need to watch from the sidelines for a summer before she puts her face in the water.

No two kids deal with the same fear in the same way, so there's no single best way for parents to act. Don't be surprised if your first-grader refuses to go to school after a week or two. It does not mean she dislikes school. School phobias may show at about age 7 or 8.

Go with the child to school and say, "Show me what is bothering you." For one child, a school activity – such as passing out the milk – may be pleasant, but it's torture for another child. The resulting upset stomach is very real.

## Listen to Fears

Listen to feelings when your child tells you her fears. You might say, "Are you afraid of dogs because they may bite you?" Ask her what she can do. The solution might be simple like "pick me up."

Remember the child is on eye level with the animal. Get down on your child's level and ask him how he feels instead of dismissing his fears. Ask questions. Even preschoolers can be precise about what is bothering them.

## How to Deal with Fears

Fears that tend to emerge at about age 7 include things on the daily news – war, famine, disease. Fears of such disasters peak when children are about 10. At that age, they can deal with these fears by collecting money for famine relief. This helps a child feel he is doing his part to head off the feared disaster. At 11, children begin to worry about fitting in. Until they are 8 or 9, most children believe death is somehow reversible. When they realize it is not, a great fear of death can develop.

Give kids simple but specific information about their fears, and don't expect a single "talking out" to work. Children often need reassurance over and over. Help children deal with fears in small steps. If your child is afraid of the dark, a flashlight or nightlight may help.

Be thankful your child has fears. Fearless kids often have more trouble later on. You want kids to have fears and learn to cope with them.

## References

*Positive Parenting Practices*,  
West Virginia University Extension Service,  
Morgantown, WV.

Parents Plus WEB Page  
(<http://www.parentingqa.com/cgi-bin/detail/sleep/nightmares>).

## Activity to do with your child

Together list the things your child is afraid of. Select one and list solutions for dealing with that fear. Choose a solution to try from your list.

*Example:* If a stomachache develops before a weekly math test, ask the child, "What can we do to make math easier?"

*Examples of solutions:* A child counts out money needed for school lunch. A child helps make dinner and learns math at the same time. A young child can count radishes or carrots for each bowl and then move to fractions; 1/2 cup of celery, etc.

This issue was written by Carol Winland, WVU County Extension Agent.

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