



# How to Help Your Child Recognize and Understand Fear

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron & Jill Giacomini

Fear is a normal and healthy human emotion. We all experience fear from time to time. However, children and adults experience the world differently, so it is not uncommon for children to be afraid of things that don't make sense to their parents. Separation from parents, monsters under the bed, loud sounds and other experiences which may seem minor or silly to adults are quite real to children.

You can teach your child how to experience fear in a positive way. For example, it is good for children to have a healthy sense of caution--they should be afraid of running into the street. However, when a child has too much fear it can interfere with normal, healthy development. When you teach your child to recognize and label fear, it helps him to better manage his emotions and handle life's challenges.



## Backpack Connection Series

### About this Series

The Backpack Connection Series was created by TACSEI to provide a way for teachers and parents/caregivers to work together to help young children develop social emotional skills and reduce challenging behavior. Teachers may choose to send a handout home in each child's backpack when a new strategy or skill is introduced to the class. Each Backpack Connection handout provides information that helps parents stay informed about what their child is learning at school and specific ideas on how to use the strategy or skill at home.

### The Pyramid Model



The Pyramid Model is a framework that provides programs with guidance on how to promote social emotional competence in all children and design effective interventions that support young children who might have persistent challenging behavior. It also provides practices to ensure that children with social emotional delays receive intentional teaching. Programs that implement the Pyramid Model are eager to work together with families to meet every child's individualized learning and support needs. To learn more about the Pyramid Model, please visit [ChallengingBehavior.org](http://ChallengingBehavior.org).

### More Information

More information and resources on this and other topics are available on our website, [ChallengingBehavior.org](http://ChallengingBehavior.org).



[ChallengingBehavior.org](http://ChallengingBehavior.org)

### Try This at Home

- **Notice and label when your child or others are scared.** Include the physical features of fear. You might say:
  - » About your child, "You jumped and grabbed my leg when you heard that loud sound. You were scared."
  - » About others, "I see that little girl crying. She is scared because her mommy is leaving. I wonder what would make her feel better."
  - » About yourself, "I was really scared when I couldn't find you. My heart was beating really fast. Taking deep breaths and giving you hugs helps me to calm down."
- **Provide comfort and spend quality time together when he is scared.** If your child is afraid of the dark, you can tell a story at bedtime and cuddle in the dark before you leave his room. This will help him to feel safe.
- **Use playtime to explore fears.** Children learn through play. Puppets and toys are great to role play situations that your child understands. For example, "Wow, this dinosaur is shaking. He is scared because he is going to the doctor tomorrow. Let's help him by telling him what will happen at the doctor's office and teach him how to be brave."
- **Celebrate your child's successes.** If your child is afraid of dogs, you can plan to walk by a house with a safe dog. When you have walked by the house you can say, "Wow, you walked right by that doggy. You are super brave!"
- **Read books about being scared.** Talk with your child about what the character is feeling and experiencing and come up with ideas that might help. There are many books and

activities to help your child learn about emotions at <http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/Implementation/Program/strategies.html>.

### Practice at School

Teachers use stories, pictures and puppets to help children understand how it feels to be scared and discuss what they can do to feel better. Children practice making scared faces in the mirror or find pictures of people who look afraid. As a group, children talk about things that frighten them and the fact that things that are scary to one person may not be scary to someone else. When children have the opportunity to talk about their own feelings and learn about how others feel, they are better able to manage their own emotions and can begin to empathize with others.

### The Bottom Line

When you help your child to understand and label all of his feelings, including fear, sadness and jealousy, you give him more freedom to accept and experience the ups and downs of his life, which will ultimately reduce challenging behavior. Spend quality time with your child and listen to his worries and fears. This time together will help him to feel cared for and safe. With love, practice and language he will learn that, although the feeling may be uncomfortable, it will pass. For more information on how to teach your child about emotions, take a look at the *How to Help Your Child Understand and Label Emotions* handout in the Backpack Connections series.



Reproduction of this document is encouraged. Permission to copy is not required.

This publication was produced by the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention (TACSEI) for Young Children funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education (H3268070002) and updated by the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations also funded by OSEP (H3268170003). The views expressed do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Department of Education. July 2013/January, 2018.

