



## Parenting the Preschooler

### Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

# How do you help your child cope with their fears?

#### Ages & Stages

**PRECHOOLER** A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

**YOUNG CHILD** A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

#### Minding Our Language

**Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.**

Fears are a normal part of a preschooler’s life. Young children are usually afraid of things they aren’t used to or that they are just beginning to understand. Common childhood fears include fear of the dark, of animals, of bugs, of monsters, of being separated from parents, of loud noises, and of getting hurt. Preschoolers have very active imaginations and have a hard time figuring out what is real and what is pretend. Even if children’s fears seem silly, children should never be ignored or made fun of for having them. Fears are very real to children, even if they don’t make sense to others. It is okay for children to have fears; we all get scared!

Try some of the following to help your child deal with their fears:

- Be understanding. (*“I can see you are scared.”*)
- Let it be real. If your child is afraid of the dark it won’t help to tell them the dark isn’t scary, because it is to them!
- Be aware of what you are reading to your preschooler, what they are watching on television or online, and what electronic games they are playing. Choose shows, books, and games that are made for their age group.
- Help your child feel safe and secure. Show them there is nothing under the bed, give them a night light, or let them sleep with a favorite toy.
- Teach your child new ways to cope with scary situations. Have them take three deep calming breaths, think about a happy place, or talk to someone about their fears.
- Ask if there is something you can do to help your child, like hold their hand or rub their back.
- Talk about how most people get scared about some things, even grown-ups.
- Remember that fears are a normal part of growing up, but if you are worried about your child’s fears, contact your family health care provider or the local health department.

## Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at [www.extension.msu.edu](http://www.extension.msu.edu).

**Extension Extras** (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

**Extension Extras Enrichment Kits** (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

**Early Childhood Videos** (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

**Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children** (<https://bit.ly/38XW4Kl>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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