

# Helping Children with Nightmares

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Most of us have had nightmares. As adults, we usually know it was just a bad dream and we can rationalize our distress. However, when children have nightmares, it is very different. To children, nightmares are very real and they do not have the knowledge or experience to understand it was just a bad dream. This is a perfect time when parents can be very instrumental in helping their children.

Here are some helpful hints for parents to help comfort their little ones after a nightmare.

- 1) Understand that the fear is real for your child and be compassionate. Go to your child and comfort him.
- 2) Talk to your child and explain that everyone is afraid at times and reassure him that he is safe.
- 3) Listen to your child. Sometimes fears about life changes such as a family move, a new brother or sister, starting school, parents' divorce, or a death in the family, can be so distressing that a child has nightmares. A listening ear gives the message, "I am here for you and I will help you."
- 4) Avoid minimizing the fear and impact of the nightmare. Telling a child "There is nothing to be afraid of" or "Big boys are not afraid" will only cause the child to feel alone and ashamed for being afraid.
- 5) Avoid going along with the fear. Telling a child "I chased the monster away" will only reinforce the idea that there is a monster.
- 6) Avoid scary books and movies even if your child asks.
- 7) Be sensitive to the unique way in which God knit your child together. A story or movie that is not scary for one child may be scary for another.

Although frustrating for both parents and children, most children do not have nightmares regularly. This too shall pass.

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