

# How to Help Tame Your Child's Fear of Storms

February 25, 2019

When a storm strikes or fire destroys a home, children may have fears and anxieties that last well past the time it takes to repair the home or replace possessions. Children often develop fear and anxiety of alarms, storm clouds and even the sight of an oncoming storm.

If your child has developed a fear of storms, there are things you can do to help them process their emotions. Here are some tips to help you deal with childhood anxiety about storms.

## Going Through a Severe Storm with a Child

How you handle severe weather as it is happening can have a big impact on your child's future anxiety and fear of the situation. As the storm passes through, follow these steps to help your child have a calm experience:

- If possible, keep the family together during a storm. Even though family members may be safe in the homes of relatives or friends, children may worry if the family is divided.
- Provide extra hand-holding and smiles. Reassure your child that they are safe and that you are there to take care of them.
- Talk through the safety precautions you have in place as you are waiting out the storm. This can help your child feel that there is some control over the situation and reassure them that you have planned and prepared for the storm.
- Encourage your child to talk about their fear and ask questions about anything they don't understand.
- It will also be helpful to explain what may happen next, especially if there is a possibility of severe damage due to a storm.
- After the storm, limit exposure to media coverage of the event. Seeing images of destruction can cause increased anxiety for children.
- If the storm causes widespread damage in your community, get children involved in the recovery process. There are many tasks children can help with while still being safe, and their participation can help them to feel proud of their accomplishments. As everyone works together, it can give children a feeling of solidarity with their family members.

## Easing Your Child's Fear of Tornadoes

As adults, we know that tornadoes can be a devastating natural disaster for communities and families. However, they are rare in most locations, and damage and injury can often be minimized by preparing properly.

If your child is afraid of tornadoes, it can be helpful to walk them through the specifics of this type of storm. Teach them about how tornadoes form and how you, as the parent, are preparing to protect them and your home. This reassures them that you are there to take care of them and can go a long way.

Never belittle the fear; always recognize the fear is real. For example, a fear of storm clouds may seem trivial to you, but it's very real to a child. Encouraging children to talk about their fears can help minimize them.

## Easing Your Child's Fear of Wildfires

Wildfires are a destructive natural disaster that can cause anxiety for children. If your child is afraid of a house or wildfire, tell them about the safety precautions you have in place, just in case a fire occurs.

1. Tell your child about the smoke alarms in your home and add one to their bedroom if there isn't one there already.
2. Include your child in other safety precautions, such as clearing dry, combustible plants away from your home and planting fire-resistant vegetation.
3. Have your child help you put together an emergency kit that you can grab should you need to evacuate your home. Include first aid supplies, blankets, important documents and any other personal items you may need.
4. Practice a family evacuation plan so your child feels confident and prepared. Decide how you will evacuate and where you will go. Children often fear things they have no control over, so empowering him or her to prepare can help.

5. Talk about the people in your community who will be there to help if there is a fire, such as firefighters, EMTs, relatives, friends and more.

Also, discuss what would happen next if you do experience a house fire or wildfire. Explain that your homeowner's insurance is there to replace items you lose. Talk about where your family would stay and other concerns your child may have.

## How to Help Children Cope After a Natural Disaster

### Pay Attention to Their Age

Kids ages 7 through 12 often have fears that reflect real circumstances that may happen to them, such as severe storms. At this age, it's important to listen to their fears and be honest with them about the situations of which they are afraid. Be honest with them about natural disasters, but limit their exposure to dramatic news coverage or movies, as this can increase their fear and anxiety.

For more information about how to help children at any age cope with fears about storms, check out the Ready.gov website. You'll learn the best ways to help your child cope with their fears and anxieties.

### Phobia of Storms

Some children may develop a phobia of storms after experiencing a scary situation. Seek professional help from a doctor or counselor if, after some time, your child still is very anxious, has trouble sleeping or shows other signs of stress.

### What to Do If Your Child Is Afraid of Thunderstorms

In addition to the tips above, if your child is dealing with a fear of thunderstorms, one of the best things you can do is teach your child about them. Try reading children's books about fear and thunderstorms to show them they're not the only ones who fear storms and that you don't have to be afraid.

If the storm is calm enough, your child may be open to watching the storm and learning more about it. This is the perfect opportunity to share some fun facts about thunderstorms!

## Thunderstorm Facts for Kids

### What Causes a Thunderstorm?

Thunderstorms typically occur in the spring and summer months and during the afternoon and evening hours, although they can occur anytime if the conditions are right. Thunderstorms form when there is moisture, unstable air and something forcing the air to rise.

### Thunderstorm Fun Facts

If you know a child who fears thunderstorms, share these fun facts that let them know that thunderstorms aren't something to be feared; they're actually an interesting weather phenomenon!

- Thunder is the sound caused by lightning.
- Light travels faster than sound, so we see lightning before we hear thunder.
- The closer you are to the lightning, the shorter the amount of time between the thunder and lightning.
- Worldwide, there are an estimated 16 million thunderstorms each year.
- You can hear thunder up to 15 miles away.