





# Specific Phobias

Specific Phobia in young children is when they have an **extreme fear and a lot of anxiety** about a specific object or situation.



These include:

- ANIMALS 
- NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS (E.G., HEIGHT, STORMS) 
- BLOOD, INJECTION, OR INJURY 
- SITUATIONAL (E.G., AIRPLANE, LIFTS) 

The phobic object or situation almost always makes the child **feel immediate fear or anxiety**.



When children experience their fear, they may **cry, throw tantrums, freeze, or cling to their caregivers**.

The phobic object or situation is **actively avoided or endured with intense fear or anxiety**.



For most children (and adults!), having a phobia does not affect their lives significantly.



However, for some children, the phobia causes a significant amount of distress such that they are **unable to function in typical activities that most children can participate in**.



For example, some children are afraid of their neighbour's dog and will not leave their house, or persistently take a different, longer, path to avoid the dog.

**This behaviour may start interfering with their daily activities.**

Intervention for phobias usually involve working with the child and parents.

The goal of the intervention is to **help the child adapt to their feared object or situation gradually through exposure**.



# Tips to help children with Specific Phobias

## 1. Gradually expose child to feared object or situation

Avoiding the things or situations that scare your child will only make the fear stronger. Instead, **gradually expose** your child to the feared object or situation in a step-by-step manner.

Come! Don't worry, Mummy is here! Let's go far away from the dog!

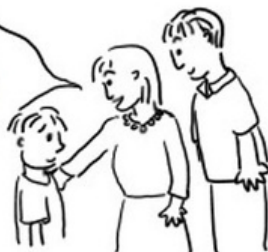
Taking small steps can increase their chance of success. **They also learn that they can tolerate small amounts of anxiety and eventually overcome their fears.**










## 2. Talk to your child about the plan

Each step can take several days or weeks to accomplish!  
**Be patient.**

Mummy and Daddy know you are scared of the neighbour's dog. We want to help you be okay with dogs, and we have a plan. The plan will have small steps. You will be doing one brave thing at each step. We will be there to support you. We are confident you can do it.



## An example of a step-by-step plan from easiest to most difficult:

-  1 Read a book about dogs and see pictures of dogs.
-  2 Watch a movie about a friendly dog.
-  3 Touch and hold a dog soft toy.
-  4 Look at a friendly small dog from a distance.
-  5 Move closer to a friendly small dog.
-  6 Stand next to a friendly small dog.
-  7 Pet the friendly small dog.

## 3. Let your child express feelings

It is natural for your child to cry, scream, or throw a tantrum as the steps gets more difficult.

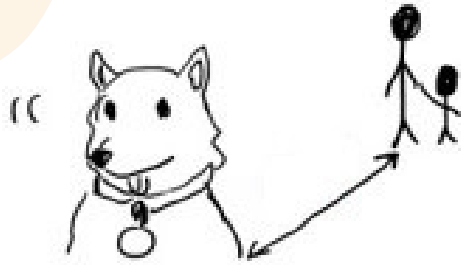
Stay with your child and wait out these strong feelings and know that your child will eventually calm down.



## 4. Re-evaluate steps if needed

Sometimes you may need to re-evaluate the step to see if it can be made more tolerable.

For example, increase the distance between your child and the dog.



## 5. Celebrate each successful step!



Praise them with words and physical touch (e.g., high 5, pat on the back, hug).



To learn more about **Anxiety**, scan this QR code or visit <https://tinyurl.com/KKHDCD-understandinganxiety>



To learn more about **Phobias**, scan this QR code or visit <https://tinyurl.com/KKHDCD-phobias>

Disclaimer: The content is for informational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please seek help from a qualified healthcare provider if you have any concerns regarding your child's behaviour.

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