

家有膽小鬼？

Do you have a fearful child?



你家孩子有對甚麼事物感到恐懼嗎？怕黑、怕水、怕高、怕在人前說話……這些恐懼都屬於正常的情緒反應。在標籤孩子為膽小懦弱前，不如先來瞭解一下孩子產生害怕情緒的原因，學習幫助孩子克服恐懼的方法。

What are some of your children's fears? Fear of darkness, water, heights and public speaking are some of the common ones among young ones. Before calling them cowards, let's try to understand the causes of these anxieties and find ways to help children cope with them.

恐懼感是每個人與生俱來的情緒，更是一種求生本能，當我們遇到突如其來或危險的情況，恐懼感能刺激我們思考如何應對，藉以保護自己。在不同年齡階段，小朋友害怕的事物各有不同：零至六個月大的嬰兒對於聽覺和觸覺的刺激特別敏感，因此容易對巨大聲響和失去身體接觸感到害怕；踏入幼兒期，孩子擁有較複雜的情緒表現，開始害怕黑暗、與父母分離和受傷等；隨着年齡增長，孩子更會從經驗習得一些恐懼，例如害怕鬼怪、壞人、父母生氣和親人死亡等。

It's natural for us to fear potentially dangerous or unfamiliar things; it triggers our protection mechanism vital to our survival. Children experience different anxieties at different stages of growth. Babies between zero to six months are more weary of loud noises and being away from their guardians as they are sensitive to auditory and tactile stimuli. Toddlers who are capable of processing more complex emotions start developing fears of the dark, separation from parents, injury, etc. As children grow, they may also develop fears from experiences, such as fears of ghosts, monsters, bad guys, angry parents and even the death of close family members.

為何有些孩子特別膽小？一方面這與孩子的先天氣質有關，除了性格因素外，某些孩子對外環境特別敏感，較容易受到刺激。另一方面，孩子的成長經歷和個人經驗亦有很大影響。假如父母本身容易焦慮和擔憂，孩子亦有機會感染到這些特質。

對事物的恐懼一般可隨着年齡增長和學習經驗而慢慢克服，但假如恐懼嚴重至干擾日常生活，如晚上經常發噩夢、食慾降低，甚至影響社交，情況持續六個月以上，建議家長可尋求專業人士協助。

家長可透過以下方法幫助孩子克服恐懼：首先，家長應接納孩子的害怕情緒和輔以同理心。當他們表達驚慌時，家長或以為這是小題大做或膽小的表現，繼而忽略甚至否定他們的感受，但這並無助減輕他們的恐懼，長遠而言，更會令孩子更不願意分享他們的擔憂。第二，家長可嘗試分享自己的害怕經驗，讓孩子明白對某些事物感到害怕乃一種自然的情緒反應，助孩子接納和克服自己的恐懼。最後，家長可多給予孩子心理準備，以應對將發生的情況。例如孩子初次上學，害怕與爸媽分離，家長可先預告甚麼時間將接他們回家，有助緩解害怕情緒。

東華三院何玉清教育心理服務中心於今年出版了《害怕的兔子小白》「玩得起」情緒繪本教材套，透過繪本故事讓小朋友學會覺察、接納和表達自己的情緒，訓練情緒調控能力。教材套亦特設有遊藝本，讓家長以輕鬆和簡單的活動，面對和處理孩子的害怕情緒，如感興趣，可到各大書局選購。

But why are some children more fearful than others? Aside from personality attributes, children may also be more sensitive in their temperament and are hence more susceptible to external stimuli. On the other hand, childhood experiences also play a vital role; or they may have picked up anxious behaviours from their parents.

Fears can generally be overcome with age and experience. However, if they become too strong and start interfering with children's daily lives, such as causing nightmares, a loss of appetite and disrupting their social life for at least six months, the fear has evolved into a phobia; and professional help should be sought.

Parents can help children cope with their fears through the following ways. First, accepting your children's fears and showing empathy. When they express feelings of anxiety, do not neglect or reject them thinking that they are only making a fuss or being cowardly. This does nothing to lessen their fears and, worse, they will conceal their feelings in the long run. Second, parents can share their own fearful experiences to help children understand that being scared is a natural reaction and that their fears can be overcome. Lastly, try to prepare children in advance ahead of what is going to happen. For instance, when children go to school for the first time and you expect that they would have separation anxiety, comfort them by telling them when you are going to pick them up from school.

The TWGHs Ho Yuk Ching Educational Psychology Service Centre has published a picture book this year designed to teach children to identify, accept and express their fearful emotions. Besides training children's regulation of emotion, the picture book also offers ideas of easy and simple activities parents can do with children to handle their fears. Those who are interested can find the picture book at major bookstores.



鳴謝：註冊社工及註冊遊戲治療師（美國遊戲治療協會）霍鈺雯小姐，及註冊藝術（表達藝術）治療師邱靖枏小姐。
Special thanks to Ms Belle Fok, Registered Social Worker and Registered Play Therapist (Association for Play Therapy); and Ms Esther Yau, Registered Arts Therapist.