

# COPING WITH FEAR

### TIP 1: Understand

Children are afraid of different things depending on their developmental stage.

For children ages 3-5:

- Visuals are the most important aspect of the video. Children are afraid of something that LOOKS unusual even if it is entirely benign (e.g., Hulk, ET). Something that looks attractive but is in fact dangerous will not be deemed as scary. Children are also often afraid of things that transform.
- Children's ability to distinguish between fiction and reality is very limited and fantastic threats feel as real as realistic ones.
- Media-based fear is very common and it might be just as traumatizing as a real-life scary event.

### TIP 2: Don'ts

Please respect your child fear.

- Do not laugh or say it is silly (even when it is sometimes really silly and funny from an adult's perspective)
- Do not say "it is not real" – since the child cannot understand the difference between real and fiction, this might actually scare him or her even more!
- Do not ask the child to "be a big boy/girl". This will only put more pressure and stress on the child but will not help them cope (even if they stop verbally express their fear)
- Do not make them watch more of what scares them so that they "get over with it".

### TIP 2: Do's

- Avoid things that might be scary for your child (e.g., if you think your child might be scared by a Disney animation film his peers enjoy, watch it together, skip scary things or avoid the movie until the child can handle the content, it does not matter what the other kids watch!). If something is appropriate for older sibling arrange for the younger to watch or do something else at that time.
- Watch scary things together, distract the child during scary moments, suggest closing the eyes/looking away, holding hands, etc.
- Come up with alternative endings, (and draw a picture of that). Together, draw pictures that turn the scary object (e.g. witch) into something funny or happy (you can print out a picture from the internet and transform it in a craft project).
- Put a picture of the scary thing under a stack of books. Turn the pillow on the other side or change a pillowcase to switch the bad dreams to good ones.
- Read and discuss a book about fears and coping. For example, Dr. Joanne Cantor's (an expert on children's fear from media) book: "Teddy's TV Troubles"
- For older children – explain things emphasizing that they are safe and unlikely to be hurt (most snakes are not dangerous, there are no poisonous snakes in our area., some people even have snakes as a pet). However, younger children might be even more frightened by such statements.
- Use other opportunities to talk about the difference between reality and fantasy.