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Fear is something we all experience. It is accompanied by many body sensations, including headaches, stomachaches, a racing heartbeat, rapid breathing and feeling unfocused. These physical symptoms make it hard for children to pay attention, think, get along with others, and ultimately to do well in school. Sometimes when adults ask children what they are afraid of, they are unable to name who, what, when, or why they are feeling scared. This is because fear is an experience. Like trauma, fear is hard to describe through words. A child may not even know exactly what it is making them scared, all they know is that the way their body feels—overwhelming and out of control.

The top 5 children's fears according to a KidsHealth survey of 1,700 children ages 7-11 years old are, in no particular order:

1. scary movies
2. nightmares
3. weather
4. war
5. sounds heard at night

In children who have severe stress or trauma in their lives, their fears may include these common fears in addition to more significant fears such as:

- safety at home
- substance abuse
- the mental health of their caregiver
- community violence
- day-to-day concerns related to poverty and homelessness.

Often a child experiences fear long after danger is passed, when they are uncertain of what might happen in the days or weeks to come and when stress and trauma is constant. In a sense, they become stuck in "fear." It is important to ask a child HOW they are experiencing the fear, not why.

It isn't helpful for children when adults tell them, "There is nothing to be afraid of," or say, "I can't help you feel better unless I know what is scaring you." Instead, adults can ask a child, "What is happening in your body" or "How is your body letting you know that you are afraid" After identifying the body sensations of fear, a child will be better able to think of things that might help them feel even a little bit better. Adults can do things to help make a child feel less fearful by providing structure, consistency and interactions that show a child they are safe rather than just telling them there is no need to be afraid.