

Phobias

A phobia is an extreme form of fear or anxiety triggered by a particular situation (such as going outside) or object (such as spiders), even when it's very unlikely to be dangerous. A fear becomes a phobia if the fear is out of proportion to the danger; it lasts for more than six months, and has a significant impact on how you live your day-to-day life.

Many children (and adults, too) are afraid of the same things, but the difference between a "normal" fear and a phobia is the *degree* of anxiety involved, and the length of time that a high level of anxiety persists.

A child with a phobia has a high level of anxiety and dread—and even abject terror—when he comes into contact with the object of their phobia.

A phobia can be an extreme fear of something specific, such as:

- a person or type of person
- an animal or insect
- an object
- a place or type of place
- a situation

The cause of a phobia may be both genetic and environmental. A child may develop a phobia if he or she has a fearful first encounter with an object or situation, however, experts don't know if this exposure leads to a phobia. The following may help lead to the development of phobias in children:

- Shyness or withdrawing from unfamiliar situations or people (behavioural inhibitions) as a child
- Having negative or traumatic life events early in childhood
- Mental health issues in family members
- Certain physical health conditions (such as thyroid problems or heart arrhythmias), or certain substances or medicines. The physical health problems can produce anxiety symptoms, or make them worse.

Resources:

Phobias – Facing your fears

Phobias

<https://www.mind.org.uk/media/7065/phobias-2021.pdf>

Phobias in children

<https://www.cedars-sinai.org/health-library/diseases-and-conditions---pediatrics/p/phobias-in-children.html>

Phobias – Symptoms and Causes

<https://www.childrenshospital.org/conditions-and-treatments/conditions/p/phobias/symptoms-and-causes>

Get self-help for phobias

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/phobias-self-help/>