

How to Talk to Children About Scary Things

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THE
Anxiety Treatment
CENTER
of Greater Chicago



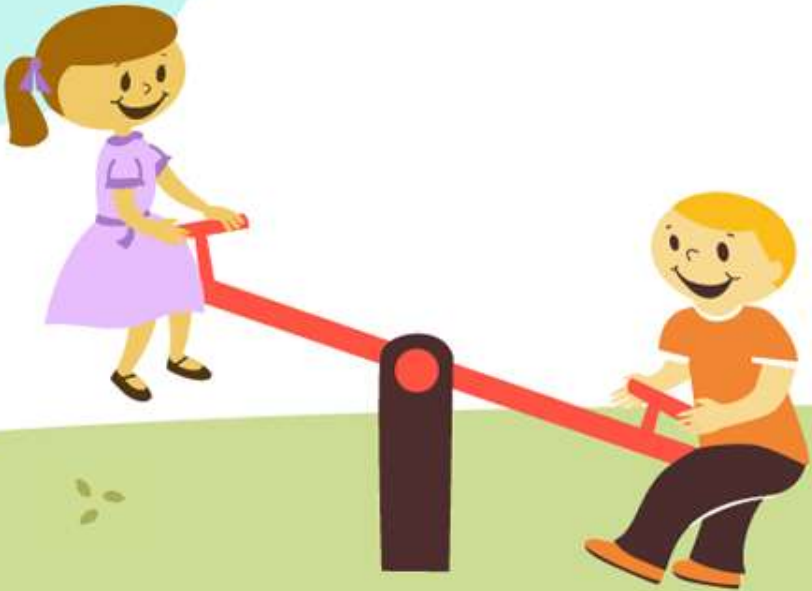
Two Tales of Good Intentions

The Cold War
Fire Safety



Whose Worry Are You Addressing?

Your child's...
or your own?



What Does Science Tell Us?

- Elementary Kids
- Middle Schoolers
- High Schoolers



What Helps?

- Calm, matter of fact answers
- Clear explanation of the facts
- No false promises

- Emphasize what can be done
- Focus upon coping
- Validate emotions



What is.... vs. What if.....?!

Reasonable Certainty

- Focuses upon the here and now
- Uses common sense
- Accepts uncertainty
- Can be observed
- Reality based

Obsessive Worry

- Focuses upon the imagined awful future
- Ignores common sense, historical fact, and observed data
- Uses hearsay and conjecture
- Based in imagination



Help Your Child to Become Reality based

If they worry....

- Did you see a tornado? No, then good. You are safe.
- Did you see a shooter? No, then good. You are safe.
- Did you feel an earthquake? No, then good. You are safe.

You want them to learn to trust their senses and inner experience

- Do you agree with what that kid called you? No, then good.
- Did the school catch on fire? No, then good. You get to go to school tomorrow.

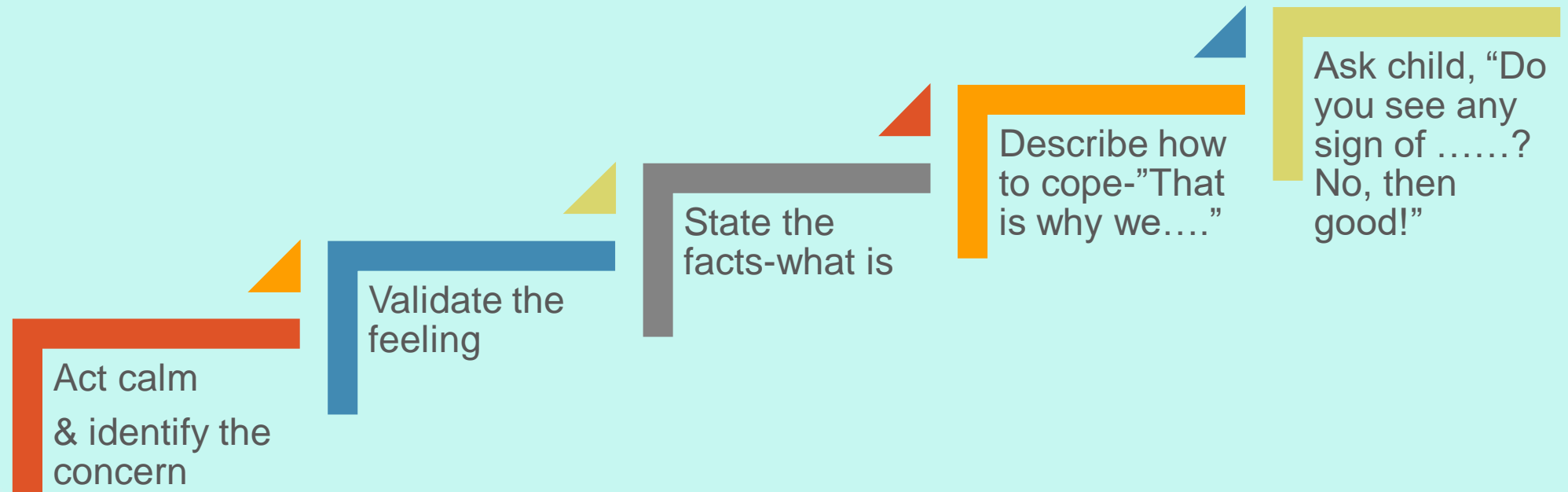


The Problem with Parental Reassurance

It undercuts your child's ability to think for themselves!



Simple Steps for Talking about Scary Things



When they keep asking for reassurance

- Ask “Are you thinking about what if something bad happened? It sounds like you are worrying.”
- If they say “Yes,” then respond with
 - “What ifs are just your scary imagination getting you to pretend something bad is happening. Just because we can imagine it does not make it real. If it is just a pretend thought, then do you really have to listen to it?”
 - Do you see anything bad happening right now? No? Then good!”
 - ”I want you to learn to trust your own good thinking about knowing that pretend things are never real.”



Dealing with your own worry



Karen Lynn Cassiday, PhD

The No Worries Guide to Raising Your Anxious Child



A Handbook to Help You
and Your Anxious Child Thrive

Thank you!

