Weather Related Fears in Children

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Key Points:

* Fear about severe weather-thunderstorms and tornadoes-is quite common in kids in grades 2-12, in fact it makes the “top 20 list” in studies of what kids fear, along with things like public speaking, terrorist attacks, drowning, monsters/ghosts, and loss of a parent.

* Kids can learn to manage weather related fears (and other fears) by learning self-care skills and build their confidence in coping more positively around their anxiety feelings before or during bad weather.

* Self-care skills that are calming include mental imagery, positive self-talk, meditation, yoga, relaxation breathing, aromatherapy (smelling relaxing scented oils like lavender and orange) and acupressure.

* If kids have enough anxiety about storms and tornadoes that the anxiety interferes substantially with day-to-day life (for example they won’t go outside – even in good weather), then they should see a pediatrician or child psychologist for further evaluation.

* Parents can model a calm, self-controlled style during sever weather to their kids, and will also benefit from practicing and modeling these same self-care skills at home as a family unit.

Self-Care Skills

- Belly Breathing – See Link to Instructions here
  - Bonus Idea-Use bubbles or pinwheel to make it fun
- Muscle relaxation See Link to Instructions here
  - Bonus Idea-Use stress ball to make it fun
- Mental Imagery – See Link to Instructions here
  - Bonus Idea-Sit in comfy chair with plush toy to make it fun
- Positive Self-Talk- See Link to Instructions here
  - Bonus Idea-Draw a picture of yourself feeling calm to make it fun

Having A Plan

* Have a Weather Worries Toolkit stashed in the basement or wherever you go for severe weather
* Include a board game that you can play, some scented candles, music CD’s that are relaxing and some comfy blankets and pillows
Finding The Calm Within The Storm - Things to Do

* Acknowledge Your Child’s Fear - don’t criticize, ignore or belittle these feelings. Talk about it openly and give a name/words to what it is they are most afraid about.
* Have a Plan and Rehearse It - it is best to practice skills when things are calm and controlled several times, then you will all be ready when severe weather occurs. With practice of skills kids develop mastery and confidence. Parents should practice with younger kids and also model these techniques.
* Limit Media Exposure - TV and Radio media will sometimes cover inclement weather intensely - in general it is best to limit children’s exposure to this
* Get The Facts - research the facts about severe weather and understand the reality of it and the conditions for it. Knowledge is power and will often reduce fears.

Websites

**Billy, Maria and the Thunderstorm**
A printable coloring book about staying safe during a thunderstorm.
http://www.nssl.noaa.gov/edu/bm/bm02.pdf

**FEMA for Kids: Thunderstorms**
Information and games about thunderstorms.
http://www.fema.gov/kids/thunder.htm

**KidsHealth: Being Afraid**
Information about fear and anxiety.
http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/afraid.html

**KidsHealth: Hurricanes**
Information and tips for dealing with hurricanes.
http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/thought/hurricane_katrina.html

**KidsHealth: Kids Talk About Feeling Scared**
Tips from other kids about what to do when you're afraid.
http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/thought/comments_scared.html

**Owlie Skywarn's Weather Book: Watch Out...Lightning Ahead**
A printable book about staying safe when lightning strikes. Also includes a quiz about lightning safety.

**Web Weather for Kids: Weather Safety**
Tips for staying safe in lightning and thunderstorms.
http://eo.ucar.edu/webweather/lightsafe.html

**Children’s Integrative Medicine Program**
Information on Complementary and Self-care Skills for Kids
http://www.childrensintegrativemed.org
Books

Be The Boss of Your Stress Book and Kit
Timothy Culbert and Rebecca Kajander

The Buffalo Storm
Katherine Applegate

Franklin and The Thunderstorm
Paulette Bourgeois

Flash, Crash, Rumble and Roll
Franklyn Branley