

Specific Phobia

Besides seeking professional help, other helpful strategies to consider:

- Acknowledge your child's anxiety. Avoid underestimating your child's fear based on your own experience. For example, do not invalidate your child's fear of blood because it doesn't distress you.
- Nonetheless, do not fall in the 'protection trap' by assisting or allowing your child to avoid his/her feared situation or object all the time but work with your child to gradually overcome his/her fear.
- Teach your child specific relaxation or cognitive strategies that can help him/her manage his/her anxiety better when encountering objects/situations he/she is fearful of. (For specific relaxation and cognitive strategies to manage anxiety, please refer to 'F' and 'U' in the section on 'Tips to help your child cope with his/her anxiety')
- Develop an 'Exposure Ladder' with your child to help the child gradually overcome his/her fear. First get your child to rate how much anxiety the feared object generates in them on a scale of 0-100. Next get your child to rate how much anxiety the other objects that approximate the feared object generate in them on a scale of 0-100. Then, rank them in descending order of anxiety. Get your child to slowly overcome his feared object by exposing him to an approximated object that causes him least anxiety first. Encourage your child to use the relaxation or cognitive strategies you have taught to manage his/her anxiety in that situation. When the child is no longer anxious about the approximated feared object, get the child to face up to another approximated feared object that generates the next higher of anxiety. Repeat the process until your child is able to overcome his feared object.
- For example, if the child's fear is the sight of blood, get your child to rank and gradually overcome other objects that approximate the feared object, such as photos or videos of blood before finally overcoming the fear of the sight of blood.
- Praise your child for his/her efforts in trying to overcome his/her anxiety in the graduated exposure exercise illustrated above. For younger children, a reward system may also be implemented whereby some forms of reward are given for completing each exposure task.