



Ask BYFS

December 2006

Question: *How do I best deal with my 7 year old child's issues of anxiety, like not seeing a parent immediately at the bus stop or fear of going to bed with a babysitter in the house?*

Some anxiety is normal at your child's age. And sometimes it is hard to get a child to talk about what exactly they are afraid of. Often just having a way to reach Mom and/or Dad by phone is enough to reassure a child. She/he could keep a piece of paper with your numbers on it and maybe change to make a call, if you do not feel they are old enough for a cell phone.

We all know reassuring a child is helpful and having a schedule is beneficial to their sense of security. It always makes sense for a child to have a back up plan for any situation which can be based on the *feeling* of anxiety rather than imagined disaster. You might ask your child: "What other grown ups do you see regularly? Could you ask them for help?"

Role playing, or practicing a response to address their fear, can also be helpful. Children are born actors so having them imagine the worst and then acting out different actions until they get one that works and feels right can provide some immediate relief.

While it is hard to determine what is 'normal' anxiety for a 7 year old, your child's school counselor and/or their pediatrician might be a good resource for you to touch base with about what might be going on with other kids of that age. Their perspective can help not only you but your child.

Counseling can also be beneficial. If you want a local resource, Bedford Youth and Family Services is available for any Bedford student or resident. You could come in and talk about it or bring your child in to discuss it with a counselor. That is why we are here - to help nip these things in the bud and prevent bigger problems in the future. Sometimes it only takes a meeting or two to solve a problem.

There are two good books related to anxiety you might want to read: Worry by Edward Hallowell for adults, and Worry too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety by Dawn Huebner. I Can Problem Solve by Myrna Shure also is a great parent resource for helping to strengthen a child's sense of capability in a variety of areas.

The BYFS is here to support and nurture the social, emotional, and developmental needs of children, adults, and families in Bedford. Email your questions to sueb@town.bedford.ma.us and the Bedford Youth and Family Services team (BYFS) will choose one to answer next month. Your name and email will remain confidential. Be sure to visit the BYFS website at <http://www.town.bedford.ma.us/youth/youthindex.html>.
