



How to Slay Monsters

Three tactics for making bedrooms safe for the night.

☉ The Skordas family's home in Greensboro, North Carolina, is patrolled by Sabrina, the watch cat: "My daughter Tory had a big monster fear when she was younger," explains mom Stephanie. "So my husband told her that it was Sabrina's job to guard the house against monsters when we were all at work and school."

☉ Kelly Lucente and Mary Horan of Minneapolis, Minnesota, both moms of kids with serious nighttime fears, developed Bye Bye Monster, their own brand of organic monster-banishing spray, "to help empower kids — including our own — through imaginative play," says Kelly. For a simple homemade version, fill an empty spray bottle with water and add a few drops of fragrance.

☉ If your kids are scared of things that go bump in the night, you can also take a cue from Bonnie and Geoffrey Arwine of Concord, California, who offer their son a nightly "rocket check." From black construction paper, they cut a circle with a small narrow triangle in the center, then taped it over a flashlight lens. Projected against dark walls, the triangle shape becomes a rocket ship. "Before bedtime we 'fly' the rocket around the room to make sure all's well," says Bonnie.

Success Story

Laugh at Fear

Although you don't want to make light of your child's fears, humor can be a great distraction from them. When my own daughter, Lily, was 7, she was reluctant to attend an annual holiday gathering with relatives she saw only occasionally. So we sat down the night before and drew a comic strip together ("Uncle Bill and the Angry Meatballs") incorporating everyone who'd be in attendance. It didn't miraculously erase her fears, but the word "meatballs" proved to be a great diversion from her anxieties during the event, sending her into gales of giggles every time it was uttered (as in "these meatballs sure look tasty"). Try sketching out a strip of your own, or make up a few games of Scared Libs. It's played like Mad Libs, but with the story keyed into whatever your child finds scary: "One night I woke up because I heard an [adjective] bug. I wanted to hide but decided to [verb] instead."

TO FIGHT FEAR, CLICK HERE

These Web sites offer help for parents who want to know and do more.

* adaa.org. Sponsored by the Anxiety Disorders Association of America, the site has a special section on kids and anxiety, with tips for parents on how to deal with common fears and phobias, such as separation, social, and test anxiety. For a list of topics, click on "Resources," then "Children and Teens."

* WorryWiseKids.org. The official Web site of the Children's Center for OCD and Anxiety offers great information for parents, including a discussion of normal versus excessive anxiety.

* childanxiety.net. The Child Anxiety Network offers a number of resources,

including a set of Coping Cards (\$8.95) and the *I Can Relax* CD (\$13.95).

* toolkitsforkids.com. Developed by three child psychologists, the Outsmart Your Worry tool kit (\$39.95) features 20 colorful cards with confidence-boosting tips for kids and parents. 😊