



## Booma Booma Boom



Storms are a very common childhood fear. They are loud, unpredictable, and out of human control, which can feel very scary to children. Julia Martin Burch, PhD, offers some tips for parents to support children who are afraid of storms in the Note to Readers from ***Booma Booma Boom*** by Gail Silver.

### Validate Their Emotions

Let your child know that it's ok that they feel afraid of thunderstorms. Well-intentioned parents sometimes minimize a child's fear in hopes that the child will stop worrying, but dismissing an emotion tends to have the opposite effect. The child does not feel heard or taken seriously and as a result, often has an ever bigger emotional reaction. Instead, it is helpful to say something like, "I understand that you feel very scared when you hear thunder" or "you're really worried about a storm coming tonight." By communicating that you understand your child is afraid, you help them feel heard, which is soothing.

### Educate

Share age-appropriate information about storms with your child. For example, in the story, the main character reminds himself that rain helps plants grow and that thunder isn't dangerous, but is just surprising when it arrives suddenly. Consider sharing interesting storm facts, such as that thunder is the sound caused by lightning or that light travels faster than sound, so we see lightning before we hear thunder.

### Teach Your Child to Self-Soothe

Kids feel more confident facing fears when they know how to calm themselves down. Teach your child how to soothe themselves in scary moments.

- Focusing on a particular sense and engaging in a pleasant activity using that sense is a great place to start. For example, they might look at pictures of a loved one or a fun vacation, listen to a calming song or white noise machine, smell a comforting object or scented lotion, or focus on a cool drink of water. Coach them to fully focus on the sense and how the activity makes them feel when they try it. Get curious afterward about which helped them feel most calm.

- It can also be helpful to focus on one thing in the environment, such as watching the raindrops as the character does in the story. Try to make this activity game-like, for example guessing which raindrop will make it to the bottom of the pane first.
- Finally, teach your child to take slow, calming breaths into their belly when they are afraid. A fun way to teach this skill is by putting a stuffed animal on your child's belly and having them raise it up and down with their breath.

No matter which strategies you teach your child, it is best to teach them for the first time in a calm moment (i.e. not in the middle of a thunderstorm!). Practice the strategies often with your child so that they are very familiar with them and can call on them easily in an anxious moment.

### **Model Calm and Confidence**

As a parent, it can be incredibly difficult to see your child upset. Parents naturally want to comfort their child in whatever way will work best in the moment. Yet coping with worries about storms is actually a wonderful opportunity for your child to practice being brave and calm in the face of a stressor. During a storm strive to find a balance between comforting and reassuring your child and communicating confidence that they can handle this scary situation with independence. For example, you might say, "I know you are feeling really nervous about the thunder, but I also know you are brave and can handle this. Let's do a few belly breaths together and then you can keep doing them on your own after I leave your room." Model the calm you would like to see from your child.

### **When to seek support**

As mentioned previously, it is normal for children to experience a variety of fears at different points in their childhood. However, if your child's fear is so intense or distressing that it impacts their functioning (for example, they are so afraid of bees, they won't play outside), consider consulting with a licensed mental health professional who specializes in cognitive behavioral therapy, particularly exposure and response prevention (ERP) treatment. ERP is a highly effective, research-supported treatment for intense fears in children.

To find a therapist near you, use the [APA's psychologist locator](#).