

Daniel Z.: Hello, I'm Daniel Zomparelli and I am afraid of everything and I want to know what scares you, so I've invited people to tell me what they're afraid of. Then I talked with experts to dig a little deeper and get tips on how to deal. This is I'm Afraid That. When I was a kid I was scared of being photographed. There's a photo of my mother during one of our family vacations and she was standing next to a giant waterfall and if you looked close enough, you could see two tiny little legs behind her. I remember that photo because I started crying, not wanting to be photographed. The reason, my cousin told me once as a joke that if someone takes a photo of you, it takes a bit of your soul.

Daniel Z.: I didn't know what a soul was except without one, Bart Simpson wasn't able to open an automatic sliding door, but that was enough to scare the poop out of me. Kids come up with all types of random and extremely specific fears. On this special episode of I'm Afraid That, we talk nightmares and scares with children. Then we talked with expert Meera [Gopalan 00:01:38] to learn how to talk with kids about the things that scare them.

Daniel Z.: This first interview is super short, but it's helpful to show that sometimes kids just don't know how to talk about what scares them. Also, a microphone in their face changes everything. Can you tell me how old you are?

Speaker 2: Six.

Daniel Z.: What were you saying about ghosts?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Daniel Z.: Have you ever seen a ghost?

Speaker 2: Ghosts.

Daniel Z.: Can you name a bunch of scary things? What do you got?

Speaker 2: Ghosts and zombies. Maybe like spiders.

Daniel Z.: Do you like Halloween?

Speaker 2: No.

Daniel Z.: Is it too scary?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Daniel Z.: What's scary about it?

Speaker 2: Zombies.

Daniel Z.: So, not a deep dive into fears, but still great answers. Our next guest had a couple of specific things that frightened them, and it took a bit of time to get there because one of those fears was being interviewed.

Speaker 3: Volcanoes.

Daniel Z.: Volcanoes. Okay. Well you have to tell me where you got this fear of volcanoes.

Speaker 3: My babysitter, Coco is moving to Hawaii. W.

Daniel Z.: here did you learn about volcanoes?

Speaker 3: I don't know. I don't remember.

Daniel Z.: Okay, so then what scares you about volcanoes?

Speaker 3: I just don't want to be near them. Actually my mom wants to go on a volcano on the bottom of a volcano. The big one in Hawaii that is active. There's actually two, but one of them's not active.

Daniel Z.: Oh, see you learned a lot about volcanoes.

Speaker 3: The biggest ones not active. That's because Coco told me.

Daniel Z.: Okay. See that's where you learned about volcanoes. What comes out of volcanoes?

Speaker 3: Lava and ash. Lava's very slow.

Daniel Z.: It's so slow.

Speaker 3: Also in Hawaii, when I visit Coco I'm going to be the farthest away because she's in lava zone nine which is the farthest one away.

Daniel Z.: You have to get on a plane to go there?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Daniel Z.: You're obviously not afraid of flying.

Speaker 3: No.

Daniel Z.: No children are afraid of flying. It's very-

Speaker 3: I want to fly.

Daniel Z.: So what are the zones? What's a lava zone?

Speaker 3: A lava zone is the nearest place to the volcano. Lava zone one, actually instead of erupting up, it actually went underground and all the way and then it bursted up and covered all of lava zone one in lava.

Daniel Z.: Is that the scariest lava zone?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Daniel Z.: Okay. Is there less scary lava zones?

Speaker 3: Yes. Lava zone nine which is the farthest one. It's where Coco's living because it's kind of like a circle kind of and then it's like a turtle. So it's like two points. This is like head, shell and then tail and lava zone nine is the tail, which is the closest to the ocean too.

Daniel Z.: Does knowing all this stuff about volcanoes make you less afraid of volcanoes or more afraid of volcanoes?

Speaker 3: More afraid of volcanoes.

Daniel Z.: More? You know so much though.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Daniel Z.: You know all the safe spots.

Speaker 3: I actually only knew one.

Daniel Z.: You know the right one, the safest spot. Were you scared to come on the show?

Speaker 3: Yes.

Daniel Z.: What scares you about being on the show?

Speaker 3: Well, the thought of having lot of people hearing this.

Daniel Z.: Being afraid of volcanoes is relatable. I remember as a kid, anytime I learned about a new natural disaster, I became obsessively scared of them. At seven I was terrified of tornadoes. Even though I lived in Vancouver, a place where the only confirmed tornado was in 1962 and maybe knocked over a lawn chair or two. Our next guests are siblings that have a fear they developed together. Are you afraid of the dark at all?

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Daniel Z.: Okay. What is it like when it's dark?

Speaker 4: Scary.

Daniel Z.: Why is it scary?

Speaker 4: Because you're all alone and you can't see anything.

Daniel Z.: Okay. Is it less scary if somebody is with you?

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Daniel Z.: What do you think's going to be there?

Speaker 4: A monster.

Daniel Z.: Are you afraid of the monsters as well that [Gray 00:07:10] was talking about?

Speaker 4: Yes.

Daniel Z.: Do you know any in particular?

Speaker 4: No.

Daniel Z.: It sounds like there's a specific one that nobody wants to talk about. Do you want to say who it is?

Speaker 4: Shadow.

Daniel Z.: Okay. Is this a person?

Speaker 4: Gray saw it at fathers' house.

Daniel Z.: Okay. Can you describe what that is?

Speaker 4: So he just found shadow and they were like, he heard some noises and he just came downstairs and said, "Mama, I saw shadow."

Daniel Z.: So now you're scared of this shadow now too?

Speaker 4: Yes.

Daniel Z.: But you didn't see it?

Speaker 4: No, because he was by his self.

Daniel Z.: And Gray said what?

Speaker 4: That he likes to eat.

Daniel Z.: Okay. Where did you learn this information?

Speaker 4: I just know it.

Daniel Z.: So you are also now scared of this shadow.

Speaker 4: Yes.

Daniel Z.: And, even though you did not see it and you don't know why it eats people.

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Daniel Z.: Yeah. You have a friend [Subbie 00:08:32] right?

Speaker 5: Imaginary friend.

Daniel Z.: Tell me about Subbie.

Speaker 5: She's all red and pink.

Daniel Z.: She's all red and pink.

Speaker 5: And her toenails and her nails are pink and her toes reddish pink and her dress is actually blue.

Daniel Z.: And she's not scary right?

Speaker 5: No, but already I can see her.

Daniel Z.: Okay. Do you think she's afraid of the shadow?

Speaker 5: Yes. I told you about the shadow.

Daniel Z.: Yeah. But I didn't know if Subbie was afraid of the shadow.

Speaker 5: No, but the only thing she's scared of is dragons, but I'm not.

Daniel Z.: Well, that's good. So you're good pair.

Speaker 5: Yes.

Daniel Z.: Monsters in dark spaces took me back. When I was a kid I was frightened of our attic. Always certain a monster would crawl out of the dark and pull me in. Our next guest is pretty fearless. As brave as she is, she did manage to think of a couple of things that scare her.

Speaker 6: Once a cat bit me and a dog bit me two times, but I like dogs.

Daniel Z.: Okay, so you're still not scared of them. Nothing scares you.

Speaker 6: Mm-mm (negative).

Daniel Z.: You have nothing you're scared of?

Speaker 6: No.

Daniel Z.: Are you afraid of the dark at all?

Speaker 6: When I go to bed, yeah.

Daniel Z.: I feel like I was told about a big fear. Am I able to ask you about that?

Speaker 6: Yeah.

Daniel Z.: Okay. Can we talk about that a little bit?

Speaker 6: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Daniel Z.: You want to tell me?

Speaker 6: Does it have to be something that it happened before or does it have to be something that didn't happen before?

Daniel Z.: It doesn't matter. Up to you. You're in charge here.

Speaker 6: I already did this once. I don't want to scrape my knee and have three big fat tiger stripes of blood on me. Yeah, I don't want that happening.

Daniel Z.: Where'd you scrape your knee?

Speaker 6: At my daycare.

Daniel Z.: At your daycare. What happened when you scraped your knee?

Speaker 6: I got a big bandaid and I was fine. I couldn't really wear my scooter but then I got used to it.

Daniel Z.: So you got over it?

Speaker 6: Yeah. And it's not here anymore because I got it when I was like two or three or something like that. I was running on the driveway, a bumpy, bumpy driveway and my dad told me to not run on it and I said, "No, I'm okay. I won't fall." And then accidentally fell. But the good thing the gate was closed because what if I went out into the street?

Daniel Z.: What's your fear of going out into the street?

Speaker 6: I might get scraped and get runned over by a car. So good, good thing the gate was closed.

Daniel Z.: But you've learned to be careful right?

Speaker 6: Yeah.

Daniel Z.: Now you know not to run out.

Speaker 6: I'm not in daycare anymore, so it was like when I was young.

Speaker 7: Do you know this movie called Charlie and The Chocolate Factory?

Daniel Z.: Yes, I do.

Speaker 7: I have a nightmare about them.

Daniel Z.: What is the scary-

Speaker 7: Scary part when she blows up like the big blooper.

Daniel Z.: Oh, from chewing the bubblegum she's not supposed to?

Speaker 7: Yeah. I don't like that. It still scares me. I'm like, what if that's going to happen to me? I have this nightmare where my mom is sleeping and I'm awake and I'm sleeping in that hole, all those kids and she's already blown up and she comes into my room while I'm sleeping and I'm like, "Ah."

Daniel Z.: That scary blueberry monster.

Speaker 7: Yeah. And I'm like, "Go back. Go back, back out of my house." Yeah. That's funny. When I say it, it's kind of funny, but the scary part is scary. I don't like it when I like it.

Daniel Z.: There was a fear she wouldn't talk about, and this ended up being common in conversations with the kids. They became timid, almost as if talking about it

made it real or that it would bring it to life. And then there's the fears that kids probably won't ever grow out of. Is there anything that you find scary?

Speaker 8: Death.

Daniel Z.: Oh my goodness. Who taught you about that?

Speaker 8: I don't know.

Daniel Z.: What's scary about that?

Speaker 8: Just like dying.

Daniel Z.: Is it just because you just don't know about what that is?

Speaker 8: I don't know.

Daniel Z.: Before we check in with expert Meera Gopalan let's listen to one of the voicemails you left on our fear line.

Speaker 9: One thing I'm scared of is roller coasters because they go really far up. So, I'm scared of heights, I'm scared of ghosts because they're creepy. And I'm also scared of spiders because they're also really creepy. I mean I'm also scared of bugs with like really long legs. I just don't like how they have such long legs. I don't like spiders because they have so many legs.

Daniel Z.: Welcome Meera Gopalan to the podcast. Thank you for joining us.

Meera Gopalan: Thank you for having me.

Daniel Z.: As you know, we've been interviewing kids on their fears and it's been an adventure I would say. Complicated because their brains aren't mature. I don't know how to get them to answer as honestly as they can I guess.

Meera Gopalan: Okay. Yeah, and I think with kids, they're so moment to moment. So what could be like a real fear three hours before you ask them the question, just isn't where they're at at that moment. So, they're just not accessing it in the same way as if they woke up from a nightmare and you were right there. That would be like a different scenario. Or if they were like confronted... If there was bees and they were afraid of bees. Like that, I think you would get different answers if it was while they were in the middle of experiencing the fear.

Daniel Z.: Right. Is there a best practice to help calm down an illogical fear? Quite a few kids their fear was like monsters or something that just isn't real.

Meera Gopalan: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, here's the thing, I would first say don't treat it like it's an illogical fear because it isn't to them. Like that monster, what does it represent? Right? It can represent so many things. So it could be like someone in their life that they don't trust. And this is an opportunity for them to talk about that with you. Right? So that's like a huge opportunity to hear what's going on in their world. And you want them to be able to pay attention to their instincts about people and situations.

Meera Gopalan: This is an opportunity to validate that all feelings are good and normal. They may not all feel good, but they are a part of the human experience. Don't minimize it, not like, "Oh, there's no such things as monsters." It's not just a bad dream. It's not just a, "Oh, you're always afraid of this. It's not real." This is real for you. And making sure that they feel heard. That's a big deal. Like, "Oh gosh, this is a dream you keep having, you're really afraid of a monster in your closet."

Daniel Z.: Right, because we also expect children to believe in... Like, we allow them to believe in magic. So then all of a sudden to say, "No, that magic isn't real that we've been-"

Meera Gopalan: Right. Yeah, thank you for saying that. Kids, they're developing and growing so rapidly in so many ways, in so many directions and so are their imaginations, you know? So, there's so much going on and we do, we encourage them being creative and engaging in imaginary play in the waking hours. So it would make sense that they experience it in this really full way, which is what's happening.

Daniel Z.: What's the best way to approach talking to kids about their fears?

Meera Gopalan: Ground yourself so they're not picking up on any of the feelings that you're having, which may just be like, yikes, my kid keeps having this reoccurring nightmare, there's something wrong. Like what's going on? So calm yourself, join them, validate them, really make sure that they're feeling seen and heard and then you can comfort them and soothe them, help dispel their fears.

Meera Gopalan: Like, "Our house is a safe place, there aren't any monsters. If you call for mommy or daddy or grandmother, whoever we'll come," like help comfort them. Next I would say, help them. If it's in the middle of the night, you may not want to explore it right then and there, but at a future time definitely try to explore it with them because they're the ones that are the experts on themselves, like insight into what the fear means. And even if they don't come up with a specific answer, just the validating and the processing and the exploring might be enough to help dispel the fear. Don't minimize and really just look at it as an opportunity to strengthen your relationship with this child. Right? You're modeling self regulation, right?

Meera Gopalan: So by calming yourself, by empowering them, these are all things that we hope people can do for themselves when they're in stressful situations as an adult.

Daniel Z.: Okay. Is there a super common fear that comes up a lot that you wouldn't expect?

Meera Gopalan: For kids? Bugs, which I think is crazy, but it's just, I guess I wasn't that frightened of it, but yeah, that's one that I didn't expect that I do hear. Also living in New York, bridge fears.

Daniel Z.: Oh, bridge fears. Oh, I can see that.

Meera Gopalan: Totally bridge and tunnel fears. Yeah, just like yep. And I've now heard that more often than I ever thought I would for kids.

Meera Gopalan: One thing that I found, which I thought was really interesting, there's data that says that children who are disciplined with physical discipline and there's yelling when they're being disciplined that they tend to have more nightmares versus more attachment based positive discipline techniques. And I thought that was really interesting just in terms of stress and the subconscious and how things come out.

Daniel Z.: That is interesting. Yeah.

Meera Gopalan: One thing that kept on popping into my head, there was a couple of parenting books and websites that I loved when I first became a parent. And the idea that any time your child shares something with you, no matter whether it's illogical or frustrating or it can make you angry, whatever it may be, try to just switch that and look at the fact that your child is sharing something with you and that however you proceed, you want to do so in which encourages your child to continue to share with you.

Meera Gopalan: Like what might be minor in a toddler or a young child is not minor when it comes to what tweens or teens share with you. So you were setting up your relationship in a way of being really, right? So yeah, as much as you want to validate the kid who's sharing about the monster in the closet so then they can tell you if they're being bullied as a teenager or if they are pregnant or whatever it could be, right? Like you just always want to be like calm, validating, join them where they are, don't force a resolution. Just show them that you're with them. And I think hopefully it'll pay off in your relationship in the future. And that's something I always try to remind myself.

Daniel Z.: Great. Yeah, I like that. Thank you so much for joining us on the podcast and helping us learn so much about children's fears.

Meera Gopalan: You're so welcome. It was so fun to do.

Daniel Z.: I'm Afraid That is produced by me, Daniel Zomparelli, Gabe Leibman, and little everywhere. If you have a fear you'd like to hear on the show, please share with us at I'mafraidthat.com where you can get more info on the guests and experts.

This transcript was exported on Nov 17, 2019 - view latest version [here](#).

That's I'mafraidthat.com. If you enjoyed the podcast, please subscribe, review, and share. It helps other people find the show. And thank you for listening.