



# Helping toddlers overcome fear.

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Every day fears in toddlers and preschoolers can take parents by surprise when their once fearless child suddenly becomes afraid of the dark, monsters under the bed, or even tiny bugs at the park. Fears, real or imagined can be a stumbling block for our younger children. Read on to find out how Lindsey, one of our teachers, helped a toddler overcome a common fear of bugs by building trust and letting the child set their own pace.

Little monsters can still have big fears!

## A common fear of bugs.

Millipedes have been an exciting find at the park lately. We watch them move and wiggle and some students even gently touch their shiny exoskeletons. We find areas with dead leaves and place them back in nature after a few minutes of observation and chatter about

them. The young toddlers through Pre-K children all love to have a look at the brown shiny millipedes when we discover them.

## **Fear can be learned from the reactions of others.**

A recent trip to one of our favorite parks gave me a different view of our millipede observations. As I sat with a group of 2 year olds digging and pouring and patting away, I heard a sudden yell. Right away I recognized this was an adult. They continued to shout in fear and I got up to see what was going on. I thought maybe an animal had left something behind or there was a wasp. As I approached the adult tossed a scoop of sand over to the side. "What's going on?" I asked. They explained they saw something moving in the sand. I began to move the sand they had tossed and discovered the biggest millipede I'd seen the whole summer.

In my excitement, I scooped it up and began showing the children. However, the adult gasped, quickly retrieved the child they were caring for from the sand and left the park in a hurry.

## **Trust is greater than fear.**

As an excited group of little wiggly twos gathered, one child began to plea that I put the millipede down. Tears began to swell in their eyes. They looked frightened, not the usual excited curiosity I typically saw when we were checking out a bug. I asked "Are you feeling worried?" They looked at me with wide eyes and very seriously nodded slowly. "Are you afraid the millipede will hurt me?" Same slow nod, their mouth began to part as if they may cry.

I explained "This millipede can't hurt me. I picked it up because it is safe. And to keep it safe, it's in this scooper." I could see some relief. I assured them, "You can look at it if you'd like or not. That would be okay. You can stay right where you are to see if you want." This nod was a little quicker, that trust that we've been building each day together, I could see it.

By the end of their viewing they came close and giggled when another child touched a single finger gently to it's back and said "bumpy!" I don't know if their fear came from the reaction of the other adult or something else. Did I want to toss the millipede down and make their fear go away in that moment, yes. Was I worried that continuing to hold it could result in tears, I sure was. Instead, we got through it together. I knew that little millipede couldn't hurt us and because I was brave, she was too.

## **You have to be scared to be brave.**

Before the millipede discovery that same day I heard a Mom at the park telling her little boy who was faced with the desire to go down a very big but scary slide "You gotta be scared before you can be brave." I couldn't agree more. – Lindsey Hatcher