

to investigate the circumstances associated with the activity. Masturbation can be an expression of anxiety, boredom, or stress. In the case of excessive masturbation, it may be associated with emotional or behavioral problems and physical or sexual abuse (Strachan and Staples, 2012). Management of normal childhood masturbation includes parent education and reassurance, redirection of the child to other activities, and discussion with the child regarding appropriate boundaries (Strachan and Staples, 2012). In addition, parents should emphasize that masturbation is a private act, thus teaching children socially acceptable behavior.

Fears

A great number and variety of real and imagined fears are present during the preschool years, including fear of the dark, being left alone (especially at bedtime), animals (particularly large dogs), ghosts, sexual matters (castration), and objects or persons associated with pain. The exact cause of children's fears is unknown. Parents often become perplexed about handling the fears because no amount of logical persuasion, coercion, or ridicule will send away the ghosts, bogeymen, monsters, and devils. Inappropriate television viewing by preschoolers may increase fears and anxieties because of the inability to separate reality-based experiences from fantasy portrayed on television.

The concept of **animism**, ascribing lifelike qualities to inanimate objects, helps explain why children fear objects. For example, a child may refuse to use the toilet after watching a television commercial in which the toilet bowl is portrayed as turning into a monster and swallowing a child.

Preschoolers also experience fear of annihilation. Because of poorly defined body boundaries and improved cognitive abilities, young children develop concerns related to loss of body parts. They fear losing body parts with certain medical procedures (such as an intravenous insertion or cast application on a limb) and may see these procedures as real threats to their existence.

The best way to help children overcome their fears is by actively involving them in finding practical methods to deal with the frightening experience. This may be as simple as keeping a night light on in the child's bedroom for assurance that no monsters lurk in the dark. Exposing children to the feared object in a safe situation