

# Bees and other Creepy Crawlies

## How do we go from Fear to Fascination?

How We Can Understand and Help Children to Have a Healthy Attitude about Bees, Spiders, Snakes and other “Creepy Crawlers”

*from Acorn April 25, 2024*

*We are writing this ACORN segment in advance of our trip to Lost Acres Orchard to view the apple blossoms and to see the honey bees pollinating them.*

First let's discuss some of the reasons why children (and adults) might fear these creepy crawlers. Some creatures, like spiders and snakes, look and/or move in a scary fashion. Others seem scary because they startle us when they suddenly appear out of nowhere - slithering from under a bench, zooming past us or landing on us. We also fear these creatures if we have gotten bit or stung by one. And, among many other reasons, we are influenced by the screaming reactions of others. If parents are scared, if they avoid, or model other adverse reactions, children learn that there is something to fear. Likewise, the reaction of a peer can have a domino effect on a group of children. The immense fantasy world of young children can also create fear of what they don't really understand.

What can we as parents and teachers do to help neutralize this fear? It is important to help children recognize and address this fear as it emerges so that it doesn't develop into a full grown phobia. Those adults who continue to dislike these creatures sometimes are not able to grasp their importance in our ecosystem and why we as humans must do all we can to create a sustainable world. Managing fear is also a significant part of self-regulation (being mindful of and managing our emotions and reactions to situations). We can acknowledge that the fear is real. “That felt scary, didn't it?” We can also find ways to make it less scary. “Wow! That startled (‘startled’ rather than ‘scared’ reframes the reaction) me, too!” Or, “I think that bee thinks you are a flower!”, “He sure is little. Do you think he might be scared of you because you are so big to him?” You might also want to help children by giving bees names like, “Wow! Mr. Buzzy sure is fuzzy!” It is equally important to not dismiss or belittle a child's fear. Children best address their emotions when they feel understood and safe. Another strategy is to help

children deal with their fear in the place where they are experiencing it to model that the situation is controllable rather than something to run away from. In addition, screaming, raising and swatting arms and other fast movements also can anger bees. The trick is to stay calm, observe and reassure. Lastly, in the spirit of staying calm, we recommend that parents (and teachers!) balance an admonishment (“Watch it!! or “Be careful”) with a different approach and perspective (“We are going to watch the bees doing their job, so let’s remember to stay quiet so we don’t disturb them”. “Let’s remember to stay quiet and calm so the bees can do their job without disturbing us”. “Bees do not want to harm you”.)

For children who are allergic or who have been stung before their fear is real. Being prepared (see below) and talking to and supporting them in a calm way helps them to begin to manage their fear and know how to approach a bee observation with both caution and reassurance. In addition to words and tone of voice there are other strategies we can all take when visiting blossoms and bee hives in spring.

What we wear and what we have with us makes a difference. Floral prints, bright colors, scents from perfume, deodorant, food and drink naturally attract bees, so we recommend you keep those attractions in mind when getting ready. That said, if you carry a small sprig of mint or eucalyptus leaves it will mask the scent of the food/drink and act as a deterrent. Insect repellent works, too, but you want to be careful about which ones to use as some are toxic to children, insects and the environment. We recommend Sting-Kill Antiseptic Swabs, and 3 Moms Organics DEET Free, Tick and Insect Repellent and, if your child is allergic, an epipen. (These are items we routinely encourage parents to put and keep in their childrens’ backpacks. In addition, at least one teacher carries them when outside.) Wearing a hat, long sleeves, and close-toed shoes also helps keep bees away.

What to do if your child has no fear? Or if you want to know how to balance safety awareness with not causing anxiety. We recommend the above strategies for all situations, unless there is a clear danger to a child, others or insects and plants. Sometimes one has to remove a child from that kind of a situation.

It is important to remember the importance of educating ourselves and our children about how these creatures contribute to our ecosystem. When childrens’ natural curiosity meets their understanding, they begin to

appreciate why “creepy crawlies” are useful, and their fascination takes Hold.

At GNPnK your children are already learning about insects and other creatures. They observe their habits, build new “homes” for them, try to feed them, read about them, and discuss their observations. We are learning about the various roles of community insects (ants and bees) and how each member of a community contributes to the good of the whole. We are also learning how important these animals are for our food supplies.