

a place where leaving would be hard or embarrassing. The fear of the panic is so strong that they often avoid places (like crowds, highways, or a busy store) where they might have a panic attack.

Marisa's fear of riding in the elevator was caused by **claustrophobia** (say: klos-truh-fo-bee-uh). Claustrophobia is the fear of being in an enclosed space, like an elevator, a tunnel, or an airplane.

There are almost as many phobias as there are things and situations: **arachnophobia** (say: uh-rak-nuh-fo-bee-uh) is a fear of spiders, whereas **ablutophobia** (say: uh-bloo-tuh-fo-bee-uh) is a fear of washing yourself or taking a bath or shower.

Why Do Kids Get Phobias?

No one really knows exactly why certain kids get phobias. Some scientists think that a person's genes may have something to do with it, and that a kid who has a social phobia may have a parent with one, too. Sometimes a traumatic thing in a kid's life - like the death of a parent, dealing with a parents' divorce, or a big move - can cause a phobia to start.

Scientists do know some things about phobias, though. They know that about five out of 100 people in the United States have one or more phobias. Women are slightly more likely to have phobias than men. Most social phobias start when a person is a teenager, although this and other kinds of phobias can also start when a kid is younger.

How Are Phobias Treated?

Kids who have phobias often start by seeing their doctors. In many cases, the doctor will suggest that the kid visit a psychologist, psychiatrist, or therapist. If one of these specialists diagnoses a kid with a phobia, he or she can help.

Some kids will take medications that help them better handle their phobias. Sometimes a kid can learn new ways of dealing with the phobia. This could include relaxation exercises that help the kid feel more in control. Part of handling the phobia may be facing it head on.