

A Review of Environmental Factors of the First Year Elementary Pupils' Fears on the First Day of School

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Abstract: *Worries of parents with first year school pupils start with the beginning of the school year. One of these worries is the fear of school. The aim of this article is to remove these fears in pupils by conducting a careful study. We have therefore endeavored to find out the reasons and the environmental factors involved in these types of reactions by conducting a questionnaire and direct interviews with the parents of the first year pupils. The results of the study indicate that some of these children avoid going to school because other activities are more interesting for them and are usually considered as truant. Using this information, we hope to find a set of appropriate principles and behaviors in parents and the board of school directors in order to help resolve the restless behavior in our children at the beginning of school and to be able to distinguish between environmental factors of fear of school and truancy.*

Key words: *A of environmental factor, elementary pupils' fears, first day of school*

Introduction

Many children become upset when leaving their parents, especially in families where illogical care of children is administered (Engels, et. al. 2004; Gray, 1987; Hagekull & Bohlin, 1998; Rutter, 1983; Sellström, & Bremberg, 2006; Sylvers, et. al.,2011). But, some children show severe anxiety when separating from their mothers. In highly sever case, the child follows the mother in the room, this problem manifests itself more when the child goes to school.

According to the reviews undertaken, about 3.5% of children suffer in this way which is more evident in girls and the better off families. This behaviour is called Separation Anxiety.

If parents abandon the child at school, this anxiety increases. Therefore, communicating in a lenient and calm fashion with the child is recommended and talking and explaining helps reduce the anxiety in child.

Anxiety is a natural occurrence in children at the start of school, especially for children who enter the pre-school or the first year.

These children meet new faces when leaving the home environment and experience a new environment. On the other hand, their anxiety also stems from the limitations of freedoms in school which they had experienced at home. Children experience changes during their break time, taking their nutrition and play time and it is natural that they fell anxious.

Fear of school is different to truancy. Truant pupils usually stay off school frequently without their parents' knowledge and are usually indolent. However, children who have fear of school

usually stay off for long periods and their parents are aware of this and such fears have to be eradicated by study and attention to the fear in the pupils.

Fear is an emotional state toward danger or a harmful motive which the person is aware of.

Factors of fear:

Factors of fear may include a thing, person or problem and situation of the individual. Illogical fear of school is equivalent to “school refusal” which means refusing to go to school and it is one of the symptoms of anxiety of separation from parents, home, family or conditions to which the child is dependent and attached.

In order to observe children’s behaviour closely, I attended first day of school among parents and I noticed the most important factor in entering the school on the first day was the separation from parents and in particular the mother with whom the child has naturally spent the first few years of life. Most children adjust and make themselves compatible to the new situation fairly quickly. Of course, some children are susceptible to anxiety besides the anxiety of starting school and this group of children needs more time to prepare, and parental and school authorities’ lack of attention to this issue will lead to problems for the school.

To reduce the anxiety of these children, we have to talk to the child and explain the new environment in a scientific manner. If this introduction takes place in a non-school environment and before the start of school, it will be effective in reducing the child’s anxiety during the first days at school. On the other hand, the child must not be allowed to stay at home and away from school and if necessary, parents may stay with the child for some time in school and leave gradually in order for the child to adjust.

*We recommend to the families the scheduling of child’s sleeping hours before the start of school. The sleeping rhythm of child has to be adjusted in the few days before the start of school so that the child may have enough hours for sleep and does not become sleepy in the classroom.

Definition of fear of school:

Fear of school refers to sever reluctance to attend school. Fear of school is one of the symptoms and sub sets of separation anxiety. Severe anxiety and it physical symptoms include: dizziness, stomach pain and nausea and ... keeps the child at home. Parents who are worried about child’s health often have no propensity to force the child to attend school.

According to studies undertaken, only 50% of fear of school is related to fear of educational performance or some aspects of school environment and in cases of child’s reluctance to separate from mother and home. The general notion is that mother and child are in some way highly interdependent. The intense dependency of child creates this feeling in the child that there is a possibility of something happening to him or the mother.

It is worth noting that there is little information in this regard about the father’s role.

Symptoms:

None of these symptoms have physical causes,

- ❖ Food digestion disorder
- ❖ Anorexia
- ❖ Stomach pains
- ❖ Nausea

- ❖ Sleeping problems
- ❖ Pyrexia, headache
- ❖ Earache
- ❖ Heartburn

Example: the child suffering from fear of school, has a stomach pain early in the morning before going to school, he feels nausea or becomes ill the night before exams, but all these symptoms disappear as soon as parents decide not to send the child to school. Sometimes due to late treatment, or their own sadness and sorrow, they become ill. Severe fear of school is for the first to third year pupils and if the relevant parties are not aware of this, it is possible that this fear will last to the end of high school years.

Who usually has fear of school?

We concluded the following, after reviewing first year pupils in girls and boys schools.

Fear of school is generally prevalent among the following groups:

- ❖ Large families
- ❖ Discrimination in living environment
- ❖ Low cultural and social levels and shyness
- ❖ Low self esteem

The significant point was that fear of school was more prevalent among girls than boys and this issue needs more attention.

Other reasons for fear of school:

A student is due to go to school in a few days time, his uniform is ready and he has purchased his bag, shoes and school supplies with the help of his mother and he has cut his hair and now, he is supposed to be a tidy, orderly and literate boy. So far, his school supplies that were arranged in his wardrobe have been lost and mother has searched the house thoroughly and found them, not realising that Him has been hiding the school supplies in the hope of not being admitted into school. Mother does not know the cause of His's fear and he had no problems in kindergarten and pre-school class, but now he does not want to go to school and insists on remaining illiterate! But let's think together with His mum to see what things could frighten Him?

Fear of older children:

Mother investigates and finds out that there is a boy in their block of flats who is third year and has had a row with Him over something and is threatening Him. When inquired, she realises that the boy goes to the same school as Him. Him says nothing, but perhaps when that boy bullied Him, he did not bow to his will and he has threatened to take his revenge at school. Mother decides to prepare Him for just such a situation.

She goes to school and shows him who to refer to when he has an objection or complaint. He teaches Him not to go to isolated places with older boys and he was alone with those who threaten him, to leave the place. He also teaches him that if he can't fight back, he should run and shout for help at the same time. Mother reassures him that she has spoken to school deputy and has asked him to watch out for Him. Mother prepares him, but at the same time, she takes

care to remind him that millions of other children are going to school and outside his home things are not as unsafe as he thinks. Mother takes Him to and from school for more care.

Fear of growing up:

Mother remembers once she had a conversation with Hussein about his growing up and going to school, Him had said that didn't want to grow up so soon and that he is still a child and cannot go to work every day like father!

Perhaps Him is afraid of growing up and tackling serious issues. That is why his mother takes him to school and shows him all the venues allocated for children's recreation and sports. He is talking about the new friends whom he'll meet in school and the days when he no longer misses home but rather misses school, his friends and teachers.

Fear of being abandoned:

One day Maryam and her mother visited Him's home and the children were playing together. Marayam kept showing Him's toys to her mother and asked her to buy them for her. Maryam's mother suddenly said: when will you go to school so that I may get rid of you? Him's mother realised when Him heard this, he became thoughtful and Maryam's mother said that Maryam is saying: you don't love me anymore and want to send me to school to get rid of me.

Him's mother was thinking to herself: I wonder whether Him thinks the same!? That is why she asked Him to stop playing and wants him to sit beside her and together with his father explain to Him that when he was little how he was weak and sickly and how much time they spend taking care of him. They told him that he gradually grew up and school is the first step in becoming independent and that they are both happy about this because he is now a wiser and more independent child, not that he is completely independent and that they will abandon him.

Mother hugged him tightly and says: even when you are old, you are still my own dear son.

A few reminders to dear parents:

- ❖ Try to induce promising, positive and pleasant thoughts in child's mind toward school.
- ❖ Adjust your expectations with the child's abilities.
- ❖ realise that most children are inclined to improve their learning and the best and most logical method of satisfying this inclination is to make sure their aims are not unreachable. If our expectations of our child are beyond his/her capabilities it will cause a negative resistance to appear in child.
- ❖ If we are forced to criticise the child sometimes, make sure it is a constructive criticism, because in such criticisms, negative opines about child's character are eliminated.
- ❖ If we wish to praise our child, we do so in such a way as to acknowledge their successes and not their personal traits and character, because if our praising and appreciation is aimed at the child's personal traits, it causes anxiety and defensive response in the child.
- ❖ Reinforce the feeling of self-esteem and confidence in the child and increase their tolerance in facing defeat and disappointments in order to help with their improvement in school performance.
- ❖ Not to jeopardise children's self-esteem and self reliance with extreme endearment and love.

- ❖ School authorities should try to coordinate children's supplementary learning activities through regular contacts and constructive communications with the teachers rather than direct interference.

Recommendations:

- ❖ Register the child in school (kindergarten).
- ❖ Attend school (kindergarten) for a week and gradually reduce your presence.
- ❖ Declare our love of the child.
- ❖ Presenting rules and regulations in an easy and relax way.
- ❖ Give presents to children for their attendance and encourage them.
- ❖ Elimination of factors of hate like reprimand and punishment in school.
- ❖ Listening to children.
- ❖ Entrust children with simple responsibilities in school works.
- ❖ Leniency especially in the first year of school, and teacher's behaviour should make school a second home for the child.
- ❖ Invite your child's friends to your home and give them toys and leave them alone to play.
- ❖ Make sure the child has no problems in school and that he is not being bullied.
- ❖ Review your family relationships. Sometimes the child has worries at home (like parents fighting) which have to be resolved.
- ❖ On a holiday, family members to attend school (kindergarten) and while spending some time there, have lunch.

Conclusions:

Fear of school is a psychosocial phenomenon in children's lives which appears particularly at the beginning of school days and it is more important than other fears of the child because of the potential adverse effects it has on child's behavior. We have to consider that all the children who avoid going to school, are not merely afraid of school. Some children avoid going to school because other activities are more reinforcing and they usually considered as truant. We must therefore distinguish between fear of going to school and truancy and endeavor to rectify them systematically and appropriately.

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Parents’ questionnaire:

I present this questionnaire to parents in the hope that their opinions and views will play a key and significant role in advancing the educational objectives and improving children’s social and individual behaviour. I therefore ask you to answer the questions, which have been designed to identify the reasons and factors involved in first year school children’s fears, carefully and with total honesty. Please specify your answers with an (X) mark.

1. Do you think using school, deputy and teacher as a threat for children is useful?
 - a. Very much
 - b. Much
 - c. Average
 - d. Little
 - e. Very little
2. To what extend do you think blaming, comparing or humiliation of child and loving him on the condition of attending school can be effective in eliminating fear?
 - a. Very much
 - b. Much
 - c. Average
 - d. Little
 - e. Very little
3. Do think it a good idea to talk to the child about the consequences of not attending school and consequently not getting a good job in the future and its problems?
 - a. Very much
 - b. Much
 - c. Average
 - d. Little
 - e. Very little
4. In your opinion, to what extend the harsh treatment of child by school principle or deputy can cause fear in the child?
 - a. Very much
 - b. Much
 - c. Average
 - d. Little
 - e. Very little
5. To what extend do you think a child’s disability and probable ridicule by other children and teacher can cause fear in the child?

- a. Very much
 - b. Much
 - c. Average
 - d. Little
 - e. Very little
6. Does keeping the child away from school due to symptoms of illness help alleviate the fear?
- a. Very much
 - b. Much
 - c. Average
 - d. Little
 - e. Very little
7. To what extend do you think kind words and endearment of child by teacher or school principle can help reduce fear?
- a. Very much
 - b. Much
 - c. Average
 - d. Little
 - e. Very little
8. To what extend do you think teacher's welcoming a child to school help alleviate fear?
- a. Very much
 - b. Much
 - c. Average
 - d. Little
 - e. Very little
9. How effective is the presence of parents in school on the first day?
- a. Very much
 - b. Much
 - c. Average
 - d. Little
 - e. Very little
10. To what extend teacher giving simple responsibilities to a child like fetching the chalk... can help alleviate fear?
- a. Very much
 - b. Much
 - c. Average
 - d. Little
 - e. Very little
11. How much does teacher's dressing affects the reduction of fear?
- a. Very much
 - b. Much
 - c. Average
 - d. Little
 - e. Very little

12. To what extent do you think teacher's lack of attention to child causes fear in the child?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little
 - Very little
13. To what extent do you think humiliation of child by teacher and parents help increase fear in the child?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little
 - Very little
14. To what extent does teacher's appearance help reduce child's attachment to mother?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little
 - Very little
15. To what extent does teacher's kind behaviour lead to reduction of child's attachment to parents and help alleviate fear?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little
 - Very little
16. To what extent does teacher's gender cause fear in the child?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little
 - Very little
17. To what extent does teacher's behaviour help reduce child's attachment to parents?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little
 - Very little
18. To what extent does teacher's cordial approach help alleviate fear?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little

- e. Very little
19. To what extent does teacher's use of sentences like "if you come to school alone I'll give you a present" can alleviate fear?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little
 - Very little
20. How much do you think child knowing that teacher does not like him/her increases their fear?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little
 - Very little
21. To what extent does teacher's expectations of the child without consideration of child's abilities can cause fear?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little
 - Very little
22. To what extent does friendly relation between principle and teacher with the child help alleviate fear?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little
 - Very little
23. To what extent does kindergarten teacher's bad behaviour toward the child makes him/her fearful of school and make them believe their first year teacher will be the same?
- Very much
 - Much
 - Average
 - Little
 - Very little