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## Changes in Indian culture create more school phobia in children

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### Abstract

Breakdown of joint family, increasing number of single family in India lead to send children to school at the early age, which may create school refusal or school phobia among children. Children refuse going to school because they have to spend a lot of time away from home. They miss their parents and are faced with new challenges and pressure in a completely new setting. Author tries to discuss about definition, frequency, causes, symptoms, diagnosis and guidelines for parents and teachers about school phobia or school refusal.

**Keywords:** School phobia, home issues, school issues, symptoms, diagnosis, management

### Introduction

#### Case 1

Aryan, a one year eight months old boy, living in Kolkata, has to go to play school with escort. It was reported that school authority have allowed his escort to stay in the classroom because of excessive fear about new atmosphere.

- Kolkata, India

#### Case 2

Master R, an 11-year-old student of class V had refused to go to school, decreased social interaction and low self- esteem. The problems emerged over a one-year period, following transfer from a Hindi –medium to an English-medium school.

- New Delhi, India

#### Case 3

Atharva, a 4 year old child would wail at the sight of the school bus. He would scream “Mamma please don’t send me to school. I hate going to school. No, I will not go to school.” His mother had to wrest him out of her arms and hand him over to the caretaker in the School bus. He would cry pleading his mother’s “please don’t go. I want to go home.”

- Chennai, India

All above 3 cases are related to school phobia or school refusal. Children refuse going to school because they have to spend a lot of time away from home. They miss their parents and are faced with new challenges and pressure in a completely new setting. Breakdown of joint family, increasing number of single family in India lead to send children to school at the age of 1year 6 months to 2 years age which may create school refusal or school phobia among children.

### Definition

School Phobia or School Refusal is the refusal to attend school due to emotional distress. School refusal differs from truancy in that children with school refusal feel anxiety or fear towards school, where as truant children generally have no feelings of fear towards school, after angry or bored with it instead.

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The school phobia in the rejection of a child experiences prolonged to attend the school by some kind of fear. This fear may be related to factors such as schooling (fear of teacher under school performance, problems with peers), negative life events

(prolonged illness, breakdown of family togetherness) or separation anxiety from parents (refusal to separate from the mother), among other reasons. Most children less than 2 years old will experience some degree of separation anxiety when in unfamiliar situations, especially when separated from their parents. After the age of 2 years the toddler begins to understand that parents may be absent for a short period of time but will return later.

### Frequency

Approximately 1-5% of school aged children have school refusal, though it is most common in 5-6 years and in 10-11 years old children, it occurs more frequently during major changes in a child's life, such as entrance in play school, changing from elementary to middle school, or changing from middle to high school. The problem may start following vacations: school holidays, summer vacation or brief illness, after the child has been home for some time, and usually ends prior to vacations.

### Causes

#### A) Home issues

- Illness in a parent.
- Marital disharmony or frequent quarrels or arguments between parents or caregivers.
- Death in the family.
- Death of a friend.
- Shifting of house.
- Jealousy over a new brother or sister.
- Parents who are over protective or worry about the child or fuss over the child when sick.
- Child might worry about parents or siblings, for instance, a parent with substance abuse, or a parent who physically abuses other family members.

#### B) School issues

- Feeling lost (especially in a new school)
- Not having friends
- Being bullied by another child
- Not getting along with a teacher or classmates
- Learning disability
- Difficulty in adjusting to rules, regulations and disciplines by teacher.
- Harsh condition in school
- Anxiety or fear of tests, presentations, group work, specific lessons or interaction with other children
- Students sent to boarding school may experience symptoms of physical illness caused by abrupt separation from family.
- The child possibly wants to do something more enjoyable outside of school, like practice hobbies, play computer games, watch movies, play with friends such as riding bikes etc.
- A child with social phobia with smooth transition for shyness is to find the start of school is often tedious. These children generally have a tendency towards acting fearful or depressed under this condition, or if bullied or over – stressed. School Phobia is the rarest form of school anxiety.

### Symptoms

#### A) Physiological symptoms

- Sweating of the hands and body
- Muscle tension
- High vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Change in feeding and Sleep habits
- Stomach aches
- Dizziness or headaches (when it is time to go school)

#### B) Cognitive symptoms

- Fear everything about being at school without being able to specify which particular episode
- What is striking is that the fear goes away when he return the school and reappears the next day when he should depart

#### C) Behavioral symptoms

- Negative behaviour (eg. Cry, cling, temper tantrum)
- Ride a scandal
- If forced to dress or breakfast, shout, cries and when it should remain in class, their behaviour is disturbing
- Significant school absence (generally one week or more)
- Significant distress even with school attendance
- Missing the school bus regularly or frequently

### Diagnosis and treatment

When the child makes and repeats these symptoms for at least 6 months, need special attention and even therapy to avoid possible impact on their studies and in conducting their homework. Children, unlike adults, do not recognize the situation as irrational.

Before any psychological treatment, parents should go to the pediatrician to rule out that these symptoms are not related to a physiological problem.

School phobia is diagnosed primarily through questionnaires and interviews with doctors. Other methods like observation have not proven to be as useful. This is partly because of (school) anxiety is an internal, lying within the person phenomenon. An example of a modern multidimensional questionnaire is the "Differential Power Anxiety Inventory" approach, with 12 scale diagnosed 4 different areas: anxiety – inducing conditions, manifestations, coping strategies and stabilization forms.

Following are different useful questionnaire regarding school phobia

- Cognitive and Life style exploration
- 'School Phobia Test' (SAT), by Erich Hussien
- 'Anxiety questionnaire for students', (AFS) by Wilnelm et Wiczerkowski al.
- 'Differential Power Anxiety Inventory', (DAI) by Detlef H. Rost & Franz J. Schermer.

### Guidelines for parents and teachers to overcome school phobia by their child

#### Parents should talk to their kids regularly

Children are much pampered at home these days. Since schools try to discipline them, they do not want to leave their comfort zone and attend schools regularly. Children, now a day, are addicted to a lot of distractions like Facebook and other networking tools. They not only want to skip schools, but also avoid sports regularly. To help children, parents should be moderately strict. Parents should speak to their

children when they do not want to study and make them realize the importance of education. If there are deeper problems that a child faces, parents should communicate and engage them on an emotional level to learn about their problems at schools.

### Parents should be friendly with their children

Open communication and a lot of listening was the right way to make child open with parent. Parents should be friends with their children. Parents must never make fun of their children and should always respect their feelings and thoughts. Most of the time, parents adopt a dictatorial approach, which does not help in dealing with problematic situations.

### Family problems can affect child's psychology

Divorces or braking up etc. family problems make the children more insecure and frustrated. Since these children cannot express their frustration or other emotions at home, they want to bully other kids at school or take the other extreme and become completely isolated from school life.

- Parents should make their kids feel safe & secure.
- Parents & Teacher motivate children by explaining the importance of school.
- Teachers should engage kid with fun activities.
- Gradual adaptation to school adding little by little.
- Good company in school.
- Familiarity with school.
- Positive attitude of parent and teacher toward child.
- Scheduling or organize a daily routine.

### Conclusion

Well known Psychiatrist, Dr. Hemant Belsara says, "School Phobia is a condition in which the child generally disturbs the school and class. When help is sought from the doctor, generally the initial counseling treatments have been already tried at home. There are many conditions that may cause school refusal such as childhood onset depression, anxiety, OCD etc. Such conditions may need initial treatment. In many cases, counseling helps in developing confidence in children and dealing with school refusal."

Some Indian blindly copy Western Culture by mass media. They have no Indian cultural value. We cannot stop them but we can create Indian value and culture to build personality of a child which is very strong and powerful and ultimately help the child to build self-confidence by discovering his strength and by providing opportunities for the child to excel.

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