



School Phobia

What is School Phobia?

School Phobia or School Avoidance is an intense fear of social situations where the sufferer feels that he or she will act in a way that will be humiliating or embarrassing and is a form of separation anxiety. Other symptoms of School Phobia are agoraphobia, social phobia, panic and / or generalised anxiety disorder (refer separate sheets).

Some of the phobic fears common with School Phobia:

- Walking into the classroom.
- Having to play sports and becoming a focus of others.
- Playing or acting in front of others.
- Speaking in front of others.
- Writing in front of others.
- Answering the phone.
- Unable to sign their name in front of others.
- Any situation that means the focus is on them.
- Imagining others are looking at them and are critical of their appearance.

Symptoms and Signs

- Headaches, abdominal pain, fainting, nausea and vomiting.
- They may be impulsive, find it difficult to concentrate, lack self-confidence, cannot explain why school is so terrifying, worry often accompanied by diarrhoea.
- The child may be tired, exhausted and shaky.
- They will be apprehensive about new situations, insecure, tend to show off to compensate, crave sweet things.
- Hate to use school toilets, either because they are dirty or because he / she cannot go to toilet with other children nearby.
- Mentally sluggish, apprehensive, lacks initiative, poor physical stamina, clumsy, bad at games, hate being laughed at.

Treatment

Children who suffer from School Phobia find relief from their symptoms when treated with cognitive-behavioural therapy, medications or a combination of the two. Therapy may involve learning to view social events differently eg school; being exposed to a seemingly threatening social situation in such a way that it becomes easier to face; and learning anxiety-reducing techniques, social skills, and relaxation techniques.

The medications that have proven effective include antidepressants called MAO inhibitors. Drugs called beta-blockers have helped people with a specific form of School Phobia called performance phobia. For example, musicians or others with this anxiety may be prescribed a beta-blocker for use on the day of a performance.