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**ИЗВЕСТИЯ НА  
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## CHILDREN'S FEARS – IDENTIFICATION AND STRATEGIES FOR THEIR EFFECTIVE OVERCOMING

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***Abstract:** This article provides an in-depth look at children's fears, focusing on methods for identifying and managing them. It discusses key signs that help parents and professionals recognize fears in children's behavior, emotions and physical reactions. The article describes how to have a dialogue with children about their fears and suggests strategies for developing effective coping mechanisms. professional support in more serious cases of anxiety. The goal is for those affected to receive appropriate tools and a set of skills and knowledge to help children overcome their fears and support their psycho-emotional development.*

***Keywords:** childhood fears, fear identification, behavioral signs, emotional reactions, physical symptoms, communication with children, coping strategies, professional help, parental support and psycho-emotional development.*

### INTRODUCTION

Childhood fears are a fundamental aspect of emotional and psychological growth that requires and deserves careful and patient consideration. The introduction of children to the world is a process marked by many new experiences and challenges that naturally cause fears and anxieties. Understanding and addressing these fears is of utmost importance, as they have the potential to shape the way a child perceives himself and the world around him, influencing his future development and well-being.

The topic of childhood fears is relevant and significant due to the continuous changes in social dynamics and educational structures, as well as due to the growing recognition of the importance of early psychological support. In today's world, where children are exposed to an increasingly diverse variety of stimuli and potential sources of stress, the ability to identify and manage children's fears is critical to creating a healthy foundation for their personal development.

My choice of this topic for detailed consideration and analysis is motivated by the desire to provide support for parents, teachers and professionals who work with children to recognize and adequately respond to the fears their children face. Thus, awareness and preparation help overcome these fears, facilitating the child's path to a fulfilling and successful future as an adult.

### ESSENCE AND DEFINITIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF FEAR

Fear is a fundamental emotion that plays a key role in human survival mechanisms. Various scientists and psychologists have formulated their own definitions of fear, emphasizing different aspects of this feeling. Some of the common definitions that cover the wide range of interpretations of fear are:

- **Sigmund Freud** saw fear as an emotional response to a real, external threat, distinguishing fear from anxiety, which he considered an internal threat. According to Freud, fear is related to the expectation of danger. [*Starkstein, S., & Starkstein, S. 2018*]
- **Carl Jung** believed that fear is related to the unconscious and can manifest itself through symbolic dreams and visions, reflecting the internal conflicts and insecurities of the individual. [*Daniel, R., 2017*]

- **Abraham Maslow**, within his hierarchy of needs, considered fear as an obstacle to satisfying the higher needs of man, such as self-improvement and self-realization. [**Rodulfo, J. 2018**]
- **John B. Watson**, as a behaviorist, defined fear in the context of learned behavior that could be induced and modified through conditions and stimuli. [**Watson, J. B. 2017**]
- **Robert Plucik** incorporates fear into his "Wheel of Emotions" as a basic emotion that is important for adaptation to the environment. He sees it as a response to threats, which stimulates survival actions.
- **Joseph LeDoux** is a neurobiologist and studies fear as a neurological process that involves the amygdala and other parts of the brain that are responsible for processing emotions.

These diverse approaches to fear highlight its complexity and multi-layered nature as a phenomenon that varies according to individual, cultural, and philosophical circumstances.

### VARIETIES OF FEAR

The main types of fear are classified according to different criteria.

#### *According to the origin of fear:*

- **Real fears** that are related to specific, external threats or dangers. For example, fear of injury, fear of natural disasters such as earthquakes or floods, or fear of animals such as spiders or dogs.
- **Social fears** related to social interaction or appreciation of others. Social anxiety, fear of public speaking, or fear of rejection are typical examples of social fears that hinder interpersonal interactions and social integration.
- **Phobias** are intense, irrational fears that refer to specific objects or situations, such as arachnophobia (fear of spiders) or agoraphobia (fear of open or crowded places). Phobias often trigger trigger avoidance and severely disrupt a person's daily activities.
- **Existential fears** related to the deeper issues of human existence, such as fear of death or fear of the meaninglessness of life. These are often associated with philosophical reflections on death, freedom, and isolation.
- **Anxiety disorders**, such as general anxiety, panic disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which involve chronic fear or anxiety, often without a clear external cause.

#### *According to age specificity:*

- **Babies (0-2 years old)** experience fear of separation from their parents or significant others who care for them, especially between 6 and 18 months. They also show fear of strangers around 7-8 months and it is possible to continue through the first years of life.
- **Young children (2-5 years old)** experience fear of the dark or monsters, due to developed imagination, but still cannot fully distinguish reality from fantasy. At this age period, children have a fear of using the toilet or water (swimming, bathing), which is due to fear of control over their own body.
- **Preschool and early school age (5-10 years)** is characterized by fear of physical injury, as children become more aware of physical dangers and experience fear of injuries that could happen to them during play or other activities. A very characteristic fear during this age period is the fear of natural disasters or war. appear after learning about them from school, the media, or conversations.
- **High school age (10-18 years old)** is characterized by social fears, including fear of rejection by peers, fear of failure in school or sports, and fear of public compromise. Existential fears also engage the minds of high school students, as they consider more fundamental and philosophical questions related to the fear of death or uncertainty about the future.

#### *According to its severity and impact:*

- *Mild fears* that do not significantly affect daily activities and social interactions.
- *Debilitating fears* that say a significant impact on a person's life, leading to avoidance of public places, social isolation or serious psychological disorders.

***According to the duration of the fear:***

- *Short-term fears*, also called transient fears, which are often associated with specific events or situations.
- *Chronic fears* – they are long-term and require professional attention and/or treatment to manage them.

**IDENTIFICATION AND MANIFESTATIONS OF CHILDREN'S FEARS**

Identifying fears in children requires careful observation and understanding of their behavioral, emotional, and physical manifestations. [*Garcia, R. 2017*] Some key indicators and methods that would help parents, teachers and professionals recognize that a child is experiencing fear are:

***Behavioral indicators***

- *Avoidance* – the child actively avoids certain places, people, objects or situations that cause fear in the little person.
- *Attachment* – the child shows an increased need for closeness or affection for a parent or significant other adult who is raising him, especially in new or unfamiliar situations.
- *Developmental regression* or a return to earlier stages of development, such as bedwetting or talking as a younger child.
- *Aggression* – some children react aggressively in response to fear.

***Emotional indicators***

- *Crying or disorder* – indications of fear are unprovoked crying or a visible disorder.
- *Anxiety* or manifestations of nervousness, of fear when the child is about to face a certain situation.
- *Tension* – an emotional indicator that a child is afraid is when he seems constantly tense or alert.

***Physical indicators***

- *Somatic symptoms* – if there are stomach pains, headaches, heart palpitations or even nausea, then this indicates that the child is afraid.
- *Changes in appetite or sleep*, trouble falling asleep, nightmares or changes in appetite are also indicators of fear.

***Cognitive indicators***

- *Focus on negative scenarios* – the child expresses fears or worries about possible negative outcomes in future or current situations.
- *Excessive questions or the need for reassurance* – indications of fearful experiences are frequent asking security questions and seeking reassurance from adults.

***Manifestations of fear***

The manifestations of fear are diverse and vary greatly, including physical reactions, emotional expressions, and behavioral changes.

***Physical reactions:***

- Increased heart rate and rapid breathing – these reactions are part of the sympathetic nervous system, which prepares the body for immediate action.

- Sweating – this is another symptom of the activation of the sympathetic nervous system, which helps cool the body in preparation for action.
- Tremor – tremors are common with a strong feeling of fear.
- Sensory acuity – in a moment of fear, the senses are strengthened, with vision and hearing becoming sharper to catch potential threats in the environment.

*Emotional manifestations:*

- Feelings of anxiety or panic - fear often triggers an inner feeling of anxiety or even panic attacks.
- Avoidance – the emotional reaction to fear often leads to avoidance of situations, places or people that are perceived as threatening.
- Anxiety – the constant experience of fear leads to a general state of anxiety that is difficult to manage.

*Cognitive manifestations:*

- Negative thinking – fear often leads to catastrophic thinking or assumptions about the worst possible outcome of the situation.
- Hypervigilance – a person becomes extremely vigilant about the environment in search of any threats.
- Focus on threats – it is common to pay excessive attention to potential dangers, even when they are unlikely.

Understanding these manifestations of fear helps people and professionals develop more effective coping strategies and intervention when fears begin to negatively affect daily life or well-being. [*Altheide, D. L. 2018*]

### **CAUSES OF CHILDREN'S FEARS**

Children's fears are complex and are often triggered by various factors that intertwine and interact with each other. Understanding the causes of these fears is key to overcoming them. Here are some of the main causes of children's fears:

#### ***Biological factors***

- *Instinctive reactions* – children, as well as adults, have innate instincts for self-preservation that cause fear when perceiving a potential threat.
- *Temperament* – the individual typological characteristic of a child also plays a role in how likely he or she is to experience fear. Children with a more sensitive temperament are more prone to anxiety and fear.

#### ***Psychological factors***

- *Cognitive development* – at certain stages of development, children cannot fully distinguish reality from fantasy, leading to fears of imaginary creatures or situations.
- *Lack of experience* – children are often afraid of the unknown. Lack of previous experience with certain situations or objects causes fear.

### ***Social and family factors***

- *Learned behavior* – children often copy the fear reactions they observe in their parents or other significant adults. If a child sees that a parent is afraid of dogs or the dentist, they will also develop similar fears.
- *Family dynamics* – experiences of stress or trauma in the family cause or intensify fears in children.

### ***Trials and Traumas***

- *Personal experiences* – experiencing a traumatic event, such as a severe medical accident or natural disaster, causes long-term fears in the child.
- *Media impact* – exposure to scary scenes in the media, such as movies, television programs, or even news, also brings fears into a child's worldview.

Understanding these diverse causes of children's fears helps parents, teachers, and professionals develop more effective approaches to support and intervention that meet each child's individual needs.

[*Bento, G., & Dias, G. 2017*]

## **STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING AND OVERCOMING CHILDREN'S FEARS**

Support and strategies for overcoming fears in children are extremely important to help them deal with these feelings in a healthy way and develop confidence and coping skills. Effective strategies that parents and professionals could implement are:

- **Recognition and validation of fears.** It is important to acknowledge and validate the child's feelings of fear rather than dismissing or ignoring them. It is constructive to show understanding and sympathy to the child by discussing fears openly and making sure that it is normal and acceptable to be afraid of certain things.
- **Education and awareness.** It is important to help the child understand what triggers their fears. It is important to explain the reality of the situation or object that triggers the fear, as well as provide facts that will help reduce the fear.
- **Gradual and controlled exposure** of the child to the object or situation that causes fear in him could influence its reduction. For example, if the child is afraid of dogs, his gradual interaction with small and friendly dogs in a controlled environment helps to reduce the fear of dogs.
- **Building coping strategies.** Teaching your child fear-coping techniques, such as deep breathing, counting to ten, or visualizing pleasant places and memories, helps him manage his reactions when fear appears.
- **Setting up a safe environment.** Creating a sense of security in the child at home by providing him with consistency and predictability in daily routines. In this way, he feels more secure and stable.
- **Support through play.** The use of games and activities provides the child with a safe and supportive environment in which he calmly expresses his fears. Games provide an opportunity to enter roles where the child practices coping with fearful situations.
- **Professional help.** If the child's fears are particularly intense or prolonged and affect his behavior and emotional state, seeking professional help from a psychologist or other mental health professional is necessary.

The implementation of these strategies will significantly help the child overcome his fears and develop resilience, which is key to his full and healthy development.

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