

Natural Help 4...

Separation Anxiety Disorder



What is Separation Anxiety Disorder?

When babies are less than 7 months of age they are willing to share their smiles with everyone and are happy to be comforted by almost any caring and loving individual. After 7 months however, infants are more **aware of their dependence on their primary caregivers** and begin forming very strong relationships with them.

A once care-free child can all of a sudden become very attached and increasingly more upset at the notion of being left at daycare or with the babysitter. This is an important developmental stage where **babies suddenly become wary of strangers** and both concerned and anxious when familiar people leave the room or house.

Until a child reaches the age 3 or 4 years, **Separation Anxiety disorder in children** is considered routine and a healthy part of development. It becomes a diagnosable disorder when the anxiety and fear become excessive, or beyond what is expected for the child's age.

Children with **Separation Anxiety** often have unrealistic fears of being separated from the important people in their lives and are persistently worried that something terrible will happen to them. They can become **clingy, tearful and may refuse to go to school** or even leave the house. In some cases they are even afraid of sleeping in their own room separate from their parents.

Diagnosing Separation Anxiety Disorder

Symptoms of **Separation Anxiety disorder in children** vary, but common symptoms can include:

- Clingy behavior and tearfulness on being left alone, or the idea of being left alone
- Fear that something terrible will happen to their loved ones if they leave
- Fear of being abandoned – that loved ones will not return
- Fear that harm will come to them if they are without their family
- Nightmares and difficulty falling asleep without a familiar person in the room with them
- 'Shadowing' parents and following them around the house, from room to room
- Refusal to go to school
- Frequent tantrums when the parent or primary caregiver leaves them in the care of others.
- Unrealistic fears: such as a fear of the dark, monsters, or burglars
- Physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches that have no

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physical cause

The common age of onset for **Separation Anxiety disorder in children** is between 7 and 11 years, affecting both girls and boys equally. Although less common, it can also develop in the teenage years.

Recent studies have indicated that although the disorder affects as many as 4% of school-going children, **the rate of recovery is high** (with most children eventually growing out of their **Separation Anxiety**).

However, if **Separation Anxiety** is left untreated, children suffering with the disorder are at higher **risk of developing other related anxiety disorders such as phobias** in their adult years. With appropriate treatment, a child can learn to cope with and resolve these excessive fears.

Should your child present these symptoms, a medical practitioner will give him or her a physical examination and obtain a complete medical history to **rule out any possible medical conditions** that may result in similar symptoms such as thyroid problems or side-effects of some conventional drugs or medication. This may involve blood tests and urine analysis, or other medical checks that your health care professional may deem necessary.

If a medical condition is ruled out, you may be referred to a child psychologist or other qualified mental health practitioner who will do further assessments before a diagnosis is made. You will be asked about your child's developmental history, family history and any other information that is needed.

You will also be asked to describe your child's behavior and the situations in which the anxiety occurs. Other assessment tools such as questionnaires and observations may also be applied. Once a diagnosis is made, **be sure to ask about all possible treatment options** and explore which ones would best suit your child!

While many professionals are quick to recommend prescription drugs, these are not always necessary for a successful recovery and it is important to explore all your options before making any decisions!

What Causes Separation Anxiety Disorder?

Genetics – Children whose parents have an anxiety disorder are more likely to develop **Separation Anxiety Disorder** than others. This suggests that a tendency towards anxiety may be genetic. Other personality traits may also make a child more susceptible to the disorder - for example shyness.

Past Experience and Stress – Certain traumatic past experiences may make a child more vulnerable to the disorder than others. Loss of a loved one as a result of death or divorce, a lengthy hospital stay or other traumatic separation may also 'teach' your child that bad things happen and the world is not a safe, constant place. Other stressful life events, especially those involving great change such as moving house or changing school, also seem to increase susceptibility.

Learnt behavior – Overly anxious or over-protective parents may inadvertently instill fears in their children. In other cases parents may be practicing poor



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Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

parenting techniques relating to separation - thus making departures a difficult time for their child. (For example, some parents think that by sneaking off quietly, they avoid making their child anxious when this tends to do the opposite.)

Help for Separation Anxiety Disorder

[Separation anxiety](#) is usually treated with some form of psychotherapy and/or prescription medication - although there is much controversy about putting children on schedule drugs.

Alternative treatments for **easing [separation anxiety](#)** such as relaxation and deep breathing techniques as well as **herbal and homeopathic remedies may be very helpful** along with psychotherapy – and are less harmful to growing children.

As with other psychological ailments, **a holistic approach has proven beneficial** in **easing [separation anxiety](#)**, while also incorporating mainstream and complementary treatments along with balanced diet and exercise.

Treatment Options For Separation Anxiety Disorder

Psychotherapy

Some form of Psychotherapy is generally recommended for **easing [separation anxiety](#)** and there are a number of options to explore depending on the needs of your child and family.

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** – helps your child recognize the thoughts that trigger the anxious emotions. It will address any unrealistic thoughts and provide coping techniques to help them change their behavior.
- **Insight therapy** – helps your child recognize and deal with the underlying issues surrounding the [Separation Anxiety Disorder](#) such as a past loss, or fear of change.
- **Play therapy**, especially with younger children, can be very effective in helping to build self esteem and confidence and to learn how to ‘banish’ the anxiety
- **Family therapy** – may be beneficial to help your family deal with the affects of your child’s disorder, as well as any other family problems that may be contributing to your child’s symptoms.

Natural Herbal and Homeopathic Remedies

Herbal and homeopathic remedies provide a safe, non-addictive and side-effect free option for children. Certain remedies may help relieve your child’s anxiety and serve to sooth your child’s panicked state.

In unity with a holistic approach, these herbal and homeopathic remedies, along with psychotherapy, can help bring your child peace of mind in a gentle, natural way.

Some commonly recommended remedies include Hypericum perforatum (St

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John's Wort), Passiflora incarnata, Scutellaria laterifolia (Scullcap), as well as carefully formulated homeopathic remedies.

Be sure to discuss any natural remedies you're considering with your practitioner if used in conjunction with prescription medication. Also remember that not all natural remedies are suitable for children and those that are need to be formulated to certain therapeutic standards in order to be effective and safe. Source your natural remedies from a reputable company to avoid problems!

Drug therapy

Practitioners are often quick to prescribe high schedule medication as the first option to manage your child's anxiety. It is important to remember that medication only relieves the anxiety without solving any underlying problems, and if this option is taken, it should be done along with some form of psychotherapy for best results. The most commonly prescribed drugs are:

- Anti-anxiety drugs - Benzodiazepines such as alprazolam (Xanax), chlordiazepoxide (Librium), clonazepam (Klonopin) and diazepam (Valium) create a sedative affect to reduce anxiety, although have been criticized for their addictive qualities.
- Anti-depressant drugs – which include fluoxetine (Prozac), paroxetine (Paxil), imipramine (Tofranil), and escitalopram (Lexapro) adjust the neurotransmitter levels in your brain to try and relieve anxiety.

It is strongly advised that you thoroughly research any prescription medication and its side-effects before deciding on what would be the best option for your child.

Other Disorders Related to Separation Anxiety Disorder

Yes! [Separation Anxiety Disorder](#) is related to other anxiety conditions such as:

- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Social Anxiety Disorder
- Specific Phobias (Particularly school phobia)
- Agoraphobia
- Panic Disorder

Tips for Coping with Age-appropriate Separation Anxiety

While age-appropriate [Separation Anxiety](#) is not considered a disorder, it may be a difficult time for both you and your child. There are a number of ways to help your child deal with this phase:

- **Prepare your toddler or child in advance** if you are planning to leave him or her with someone else or when beginning day-care or school. Help children to familiarize themselves with the new setting or new people before leaving them alone.
- **Ease your child into being left alone.** When you leave children with a new sitter or at crèche for the first time, make sure it is not for an extended period of time.
- **Children quickly notice if you are feeling [emotional](#) and nervous**



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about leaving them and may begin to feel anxious themselves. Although this may be an anxious time for you as well, try making light of the situation and keep your tears for after you leave. Make it seem that you have absolute confidence in the people you leave your child with.

- **When you leave, reassure your child** that you will be back and give an honest time when you can be expected to return. Try not to be late if your child is waiting for you!
- **Always say good-bye to your child.** Don't try and avoid the fuss by sneaking out unnoticed or slipping off while children are busy. This will just reinforce the abandonment fear, and increase the anxiety that you may disappear at any moment if you aren't in sight.
- **Make good-byes happy and affectionate.** Give children a hug and a kiss and assure them that you'll be back, but do not prolong the good-byes. Routine and rituals are often beneficial as your child will come to know exactly what to expect. Little habits like a high-five through the window, or blowing a kiss as you leave are often reassuring events that your child will begin to look forward to.
- **When you say good-bye, you should leave.** Avoid trips backwards and forwards into the house after you have said good-bye as this will give your child false hope and make it more difficult for all involved.
- **A nice idea is to give your child something to look forward to.** If you have left for an evening appointment and will only return when he or she has gone to sleep, say you will leave a surprise next to the bed – to find when waking up the next morning. (Remember that food is not always the best reward, so instead of sweets, draw a picture, or pick few flowers)

The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools and most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also sometimes called orthodox medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that, only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is 'better' than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned on by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed by conventional doctors and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the body has an innate capacity to heal itself. While natural medicines are often called 'alternative' or

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‘complimentary’ medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term ‘holistic’ medicine is more apt, given the broad range of treatment options and approaches which are to be found within the practice of natural medicine, which encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a holistic way to support health, relieve symptoms and prevent future disease. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "... more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to support health (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer and that, in many cases, holistic medicine can accomplish just as much, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs. Contrary to common perception, and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way, natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing.

In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that, like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic medicines must be manufactured in the correct way, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While ‘standardized’ extracts may offer benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper more efficient production lines), they have grave disadvantages. These include an increase in side effects as the medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction – which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete



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treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.

Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life threatening condition, don't make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will support patients who want to take responsibility for their own health.

Related Natural Remedies:

MindSoothe™: Promote balanced mood and feelings of wellbeing.

MindSoothe is a 100% safe, non-addictive, natural herbal remedy that has been especially formulated by a Clinical Psychologist for adults and teens, and comes in a compact capsule form, making it easy to take.

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used to safely promote well being and naturally support health and systemic balance in the brain and nervous system - **without any harmful side effects** or risk of addiction.

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