LETTER TO EDITORS

DO NOT IGNORE SEPARATION ANXIETY IN CHILDREN

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Madam,

Childhood is a happy and pleasant time. But, for some children, it is filled with anxiety regarding separation from major attachment figures, generally the parents. It is often called as separation anxiety, which is considered as a normal stage of development for children, and can be relieved when children get older. However, if the anxiety is persistent to get in the way of school or other activities, it is no more considered to be normal, Separation Anxiety Disorder (SAD) may occur.

SAD is a common child-onset anxiety disorder characterized by excessive and inappropriate anxiety for the child’s stage of development. To meet the criteria for a diagnosis of SAD, the excessive anxiety must have three or more symptoms as following: 1) recurrent excessive distress when separation from home or attachment figure occurs or is anticipated, 2) SAD often worry that harm (e.g., being kidnapped or being involved in an accident) will befall themselves or a parent,

3) persistent reluctance to go to school or elsewhere because of fear of separation, 4) persistent reluctance or refusal to go to sleep without being a major attachment figure, 5) repeated complaints of physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, nausea, or vomiting) when separation from a major attachment figure occurs or is anticipated or involved.

In line with this, little is known about the etiology of SAD because of the less research attention regarding the internalizing disorders in children (i.e., anxiety and depression). However, the literature mentions that childhood anxiety disorders are associated with a history of similar disorders in their family or parents. In addition, current evidence highlights the significant role of such
factors as genetics, temperament, and family environment in the dysregulation of emotion and the development of anxiety pathology.4

In this regard, professional nurses should take a part in the effort of preventing the occurrence of SAD, such as educating the families or parents of the children about the symptom and the impact of SAD, and nurses, especially pediatric nurses, need to provide the strategies to avoid persistent separation anxiety, which lead to anxiety disorder. The author remarks “do not ignore separation anxiety, it may disturb the children development”.

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References