

When school is scary - The boy who became dizzy with fear - September 2003

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Billy, a boy of almost seven, came to see me with a history of ear infections, asthma, constipation, and “school phobia.”

Billy had taken over 100 courses of antibiotics in his young life! The antibiotics had caused chronic constipation. He had had ear tubes inserted and his adenoids removed. Since five years of age he had been on Pulmicort (a steroid inhaler) for asthma, and at the time of this visit he had been on Ventolin (an Albuterol inhaler) for a week.

Billy’s mother told me that he had been “frantic” for the past six weeks. Three weeks ago, he had started vomiting before going to school and did not want to attend. His sleep was very disturbed, and he would wake up between 1:00 and 2:00 a.m. feeling anxious and restless.

Desperately seeking sanctuary

When Billy came to see me he was clearly very disturbed, pacing rapidly up and down my consulting room for a full hour without stopping. His mother reported that he did this at home too, and the pacing could make him dizzy. He was very tense; his jaws were visibly clenched. He had told his mother he really didn’t want to be seven (his birthday was fast approaching). He asked her if he would have to move away from home if he became a daddy. He didn’t want to go to school because he was lonesome for his mother and scared of being bullied. Billy said to her: “I love you desperate ... I’m desperate happy ... but I don’t want to go to school.”

Watch out for that truck

I remember a homeopathic lecturer once describing how to choose between the remedies Aconite and Arsenicum in cases of intense fear and restlessness like this one. A person who needs Aconite feels like, “Oh my God I’m about to be hit by a giant Mack truck and I have one second left to live,” whereas a person who needs Arsenicum feels more like, “Oh no, someone has slipped me poison and I’m about to die a long, lingering death ...” After repertorizing the case, the urgency I felt from this boy made me choose Aconite (although Stramonium also came to mind). I prescribed Aconite 30C and told Billy’s mother to call me if there was no change within two days. In longstanding or chronic cases I normally ask people to wait three or four weeks until the follow-up appointment before assessing whether the remedy has worked. But Billy’s symptoms were intense, and in my experience, the more intense the symptoms are, the quicker a homeopathic medicine will work. If I had chosen the wrong remedy, I didn’t want Billy to suffer unnecessarily for weeks.

No news is good news

The days passed and I heard nothing. Four weeks later we had a follow-up appointment. Billy’s mother told me there had been a fantastic improvement. He now felt OK about going to school and about turning seven. He had stopped pacing and had no dizzy spells. His sleep was very good, and he had not been up at night since taking the remedy. He had had ear pain the day after taking the remedy. I believed this to be a positive sign as it is common to experience a return of old symptoms when a homeopathic medicine is working well.

Homeopathic home run

At the second follow-up visit, eight weeks after taking Aconite, Billy and his mother reported further improvement. He no longer took his inhalers. His nose was running, where it had been very dry before. He had had profuse discharge from his left ear. Despite the discharge, he had had no further ear pain and no other symptoms. He also had a lot more energy. He had “filled out” and had a better color.

For better or worse?

This case is a good illustration of what Constantine Hering, a great homeopath of old, observed if a patient's symptoms were moving in what he termed the "Direction of Cure." Hering noted that as a person heals: symptoms (especially the more superficial symptoms like skin eruptions) tend to move from above to below (e.g., from the head or chest down towards the arms, legs, or feet); symptoms tend to move from within to without (e.g., from internal problems like angina to more external problems like skin eruptions); and old symptoms tend to reappear in reverse order to their original order of appearance. In the process of healing, old symptoms will often return, and this is always to be welcomed as a sign of recovering health.

When ear goo is good

I had already told Billy's mother to expect an improvement in her son's anxiety levels first and later to watch for the return of his earlier ear symptoms, possibly with accompanying discharge from the ear—and to view this as a very good sign. This meant that she was not unduly upset when it happened. I asked her not to use antibiotics without first contacting me. Fortunately, her son did so well on Aconite that no more conventional treatment was needed, and he made a full recovery.

Better out than in

Let's look at this case with Hering's observations on the Direction of Cure in mind. Before homeopathic treatment, Billy's disturbance was in the ear, later moved to the lungs (moving within, so he was getting sicker), and then moved even deeper to the emotional level. After taking Aconite, Billy's emotional disturbance resolved first, then his lungs improved, and finally he succeeded in forcing out the (formerly suppressed) discharge from his ear.

Don't ignore those red warning lights

The earlier, repeated ear infections should have been seen as red warning lights telling us that all was not well with this child. The repeated use of antibiotics dealt only with the bacterial infection and not the underlying disturbance that had brought about his susceptibility to those infections. Once the more superficial symptoms were covered up, the disturbance then began to manifest on deeper levels. The moral of this tale is not to ignore your body's warning signals.

"The treatment was a success ... but the patient died"

This is a case worth considering, not just because the homeopathic medicine brought instant benefits, gratifying though that always is! It's an instructive case because it points out the dangers of seeing the symptom as the problem and being determined to remove it at any price. In this case, sure, Billy's ear stopped hurting after many, many courses of antibiotics, but his bowels, lungs, sleep patterns, and emotional well-being all deteriorated. We need to ask ourselves what is more important, the symptom or the person?

Learn to love your symptoms

What is needed is a paradigm shift, a new way of seeing symptoms. Symptoms are friends not foes ... they are like warning lights on the car's dashboard telling us that all is not well and asking us to investigate the underlying reasons. If we choose to ignore these symptoms, we risk getting bigger, brighter, harder-to-ignore warning signals next time around. Children are, of course, prone to the odd acute infection every now and then. The occasional episode is no great cause for alarm, but if your child is suffering from repeated infections of any kind, it is well worth getting professional homeopathic advice. And don't forget to love those old symptoms returning—hopefully they'll be the green light that will allow your body to move on towards cure.

About the author:

Mary Aspinwall studied at the London College of Homeopathy and is a Dynamis School graduate. She is a Registered member of the Irish Society of Homeopaths. In 1992 she designed the best-selling Helios Double Helix homeopathic medicine kits for home use, foreign travel, and childbirth and wrote *A Basic Guide to Homeopathy*. She now has a large, busy holistic health center in the South West of Ireland, teaches for the Irish School of Homeopathy, and together with her saintly husband runs www.homeopathyworld.com. You can read more of her cases and articles there.