

Half of group free of phobia after a single treatment

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Fifty-five percent of children who underwent an intensive so-called one-session treatment of three hours were freed from their phobia. The treatment is carried out on a single occasion, is quick and cost-effective, with no side effects. The treatment form is also culture-neutral and does not need to be adapted to the country or the place it is to be used. This is shown by Lena Reuterskiöld at the Department of Psychology, Stockholm University in Sweden, in the dissertation she recently submitted.

“[Children](#) who are not cured of their phobias run a great risk of developing other areas of [anxiety](#) later on. It’s therefore important to find effective forms of [treatment](#) that can reduce this risk. The method we have now tested also functions for other types of phobias,” says Lena Reuterskiöld.

In a one-session treatment the children, together with their therapist, gradually approach what they are afraid of in a controlled and planned manner. The therapist describes and carefully demonstrates before the child is allowed to try. Because the children remain in the anxiety-inducing situation, they can experience how their anxiety and [fear](#) abates and how the expected catastrophe in fact does not occur. With the patient remaining in the situation for an extended period, without running away, new learning occurs, producing a development toward a new behavior. This is all done on a voluntary basis, which is also a precondition for successful treatment.

“One-session treatment has also proven to be effective over time. Adults who have been treated with this method have been able to notice the effects of the treatment more than a year after the session. And nothing indicates that the effect would taper off sooner in children, which we assume will soon be confirmed by a follow-up study,” says Lena Reuterskiöld.

Besides the time aspect, the treatment offers other positive consequences.

“In cases where there anxiety problems of another kind than that targeted by the treatment, they too were alleviated in connection with a one-session treatment. This seems to indicate that the children take with them the knowledge they attain from this brief intervention and apply it to other problem areas,” says Lena Reuterskiöld.

The dissertation is based on three empirical studies of children and adolescents with various [specific phobias](#) in Stockholm, Sweden, and in Virginia in the US. The overarching purpose of the treatment was to contribute to our understanding of fears, anxiety, and specific phobias in children and to evaluate the efficacy and the transferability of one-session treatment for specific phobias in children from one culture to another.

The most important answers in the study are that one-session treatment is an effective treatment for children and adolescents with different types of specific phobias, that the effects last for at least six months, and that such treatment appears to be transferable from one culture and country to another.

“Fears, anxiety, and specific phobias in children and adolescents are no new phenomena, but their incidence seems to be increasing. Fortunately our understanding and willingness to treat them has also grown,” says

Lena Reuterskiöld.

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