



Life stages



Homeopathy for school children

by Bob Leckridge

A major new seven-part series

Life stages – a homeopathic guide

From the moment we are born, through every day of our lives, we undergo constant change. We mature, we grow, we develop, responding to both environmental influences and to the programmes in our genes. This series examines some of the issues we encounter in the various phases of our lives. Each stage brings new challenges, so each article will focus on the kinds of health problems, which people might encounter in each particular stage.

The focus of the articles is self-help but if the problem is complex, or chronic, the best course of action might be to consult a homeopathic doctor. Most of the problems discussed here are acute, self-limiting conditions, which can be safely treated with homeopathic medicines. If you have some symptoms which would normally lead you to consult your doctor, see your GP or, if you have one, your homeopathic doctor. Don't try to treat a problem yourself with homeopathy instead of consulting your doctor.

The previous article in this series considered the issues and problems of toddlers. Let's now consider the next stage of life, which is marked by a very significant moment: the first day of school. This is such a big event for children and for their parents that it tends to be remembered for a long time. One common experience of this day is the sight of many small children running smiling, laughing and shouting into the playground, whilst a line of mums and dads stands at the school fence, wiping away tears. In such a situation, the children don't need any homeopathic help, but the parents might need something to help them overcome their separation anxiety!

This scene highlights two important factors to be considered before treating any child with homeopathy. One of these factors is the observation that children are often more resilient than their parents. It's a fact of life that the illnesses which children experience seem to both appear and disappear more quickly than the illnesses which adults experience. If a key asset in health is the ability to adapt, by which I mean the ability to cope with change, then children usually demonstrate a better underlying state of health than adults do. This is not just a quality that determines the speed of onset of illnesses, and the speed of recovery, but it is a quality that marks children out as different from adults.

If we are to understand another person, then we have to put

ourselves in their shoes. As adults, we often forget that. We tend to consider our children as little adults. They are not. They are different. This leads me to the second factor to consider, which is that children live within a social environment. That social environment is the family and home, but once they start to attend school, the environment expands to include their peers and teachers. This is a crucial difference at this stage in life. For the first time, the child is having to live within, and to cope with, two social environments, which only slightly overlap – the environment of the family and that of school. When we try to understand a child's experience, then we have to consider both the family milieu and the school one.

Frequently, a child might behave quite differently in the two environments. This can lead us to the possible homeopathic remedies for them. A key characteristic of the child who may need *Lycopodium*, for example, is that they are very well behaved at school and very badly behaved at home. This comes about because children who need *Lycopodium* are in awe of those who are in authority and do their best to please them, but when they are around others whose authority they do not accept, they can become quite difficult, bossy, or even dictatorial. Remember the old saying that "familiarity breeds contempt"? We can see this occur in children who don't accept the authority of their parents but do accept that of the teachers.

Life stages



Anxiety and fears

Lycopodium is also one of the remedies that are useful for the anxiety felt in anticipating something. Anticipatory anxiety is a common problem experienced by school children. The child who needs Lycopodium experiences their anticipatory anxiety in their stomachs with, not only tummy pains, but with a lot of wind and bloating. The key feature, however, is the contrast between their behaviour at home and that at school.

Another very common issue for school children, which is likely to indicate a particular remedy, is the fear of failure. There are some children, often rather delicate-looking children, who are quite timid and hardworking, who have a huge fear of failure. These children have anticipatory fears around examinations and tests. They are children who are usually performing well at school but under the pressure of being tested can become either become very anxious and fearful, or can suffer from repeated minor infections with catarrh and swollen lymph glands because their immune defences are lowered by the effects of anxiety. These children, who need Silica, are typically rather slim, chilly children who perspire easily, and, in particular, can have very smelly, sweaty feet.

Another school stress, which can produce anticipatory fears, is that of some performance, like the school play. The children who take part in these plays are often pretty outgoing, positive children, but, when it comes to the day of the performance they can develop one of two common patterns of anticipatory anxiety. The first is the upset tummy, with loud rumblings and diarrhoea. These children will often need several visits to the toilet on the day of the school play. They will be very

tremulous and often they will develop a craving for sweet things and sugar (although that might be a difficult symptom to spot in most children!). Argentum nitricum is the best remedy for them.

The other common pattern is of stage fright. This happens when the child is well rehearsed and ready to perform, but then, at the last minute, they are paralysed by fear and can either not physically climb up onto the stage, or stand there, rigid, unable to speak. If they can be coaxed over this, they will perform beautifully. A useful homeopathic remedy in this situation is Gelsemium.



Refusal to go to school

There are some children who become so averse to school that they just refuse to go. This can only be helped if you can manage to understand what the underlying issues are. The chances are it is not the school as such which is the problem. Rather it will be some issue related to the social environment of the school.

One of the reasons for school refusal is anticipatory anxiety. As you will have seen from the descriptions of the remedies Lycopodium, Silica, Argentum nitricum and Gelsemium above, the physical symptoms may actually give you a clue about the nature of the psychological issue underlying the child's distress. However, this approach also demonstrates the importance of taking the time to understand what the child may be anxious about.

There are other major reasons for school refusal. One of these is bullying. Children can find it very difficult to talk about their experience of being bullied and the problem might only manifest itself through illness. Staphysagria is a very commonly indicated remedy for a child who is being bullied. The key features which should lead you to think about it are noticing that the child bottles up his or her anger which can then explode briefly from time to time. In between the explosions of anger they can appear to be very sweet, happy children. Indignation is the other key feature of the state which indicates the need for Staphysagria. The child will use the phrase "It's not fair!" or "I don't deserve this!"

One not so common problem I've seen appear in this situation is alopecia areata, which is a condition of the scalp where the hair falls out in patches. This can be a very distressing problem but it usually rectifies itself over a number of weeks or months. It's thought to be caused by stress sometimes and I've certainly seen children with this complaint who then revealed that they were being bullied and whose hair re-grew quickly and completely after a dose of Staphysagria. While we are touching on the subject of the hair, another use for Staphysagria is in the treatment of head lice.

3: Homeopathy for school children

Head lice can be a very stubborn problem in school children so it can be worthwhile trying a dose of *Staphysagria* orally to see if the body can throw off this little pest (a single dose of 30c should be sufficient).

The bullying or aggressive child

Of course, the child who is doing the bullying should be considered too. We all think “my child would never do that!” but what can we do when it turns out that our child is the one doing the bullying? Bullying, like all behaviours, needs to be understood if it’s going to be modified. Mostly, bullying is about power, or the need for attention, rather than being about wickedness. I mentioned *Lycopodium* earlier on, and you can see from that description how easily this situation can develop into bullying. In other words, it may not be that the child is “bad at home and good at school”; it may be, rather, that they are pushing their weight around with younger and weaker children. The child who needs *Lycopodium* often has a big issue with feeling they have their appropriate place in the power hierarchy and they might even have been bullied earlier in the school, but now that there are smaller and weaker children around, the older *Lycopodium* child starts to act like a little dictator.

Another remedy that is frequently indicated for children who are bullies is *Tuberculinum bovinum*. The *Tuberculinum* child is usually restless and always on the go. In fact, it is a common remedy for children who have ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Along with this they have very strong wills and can be very stubborn. They are actually quite afraid of many things, particularly dogs,



darkness and thunderstorms, but there is often a nasty, destructive streak, which shows itself in quite malicious destructiveness.

A third possible remedy for a child who is bullying is *Apis mellifica*. These children are industrious, busy children at school who have quite a different energy from their classmates. They like to organise everyone and can be very bossy. Think of the queen bee. This is how they are. They can also be very jealous children. This might be when the bossiness turns to bullying. Just as the queen bee will admit no rivals into the hive, so will the child who needs *Apis* be competitive and engaged in power struggles for dominance in the classroom.

I always find it helpful to ask a child’s parents to describe what they notice about their offspring when they are playing with other children. The child who needs *Apis* will be the boss, the organiser. They are not followers! These children can be particularly engaging and their personal self-esteem is usually pretty high. They can be quite precocious and will communicate with adults in surprisingly adult ways. The kinds of illnesses these children experience are consistent with what you might expect from a bee sting. They tend to get

allergic conditions, like eczema and urticaria (heat spots or “nettle rash”), or hot, red swellings from infections.

So, both *Tuberculinum bovinum* and *Apis* may be useful remedies for the hyperactive children who are very restless and unsettled. Other remedies to consider in hyperactivity are *Sulphur* and *Tarentula hispania*. *Sulphur* is a good example of the inquisitive, disorganised type. These children can appear to have quite a short attention span due to their insatiable curiosity. They are fascinated by everything and typically move quickly from one interest to another. This leads to them being very restless and messy. Like many typical boys they are so fascinated with the world that they neglect things like cleanliness and personal hygiene. They are the “champion dirt collectors”. In fact, collecting is what they like to best. They are great collectors of many things – not just dirt! They might collect comic books, trading cards, toy cars, stamps, the list is endless. These collections absorb them because they are enthralled by everything in their world. Their curiosity knows no bounds. This can lead to them being very restless and unsettled and having difficulty in seeing things through

Life stages



to conclusions – on their way to one goal they are distracted off down some other path! As you might guess by now, such active types have faster metabolisms and this makes them likely to be hot children who really don't feel the cold as much as others do.

Spider remedies

Similar to Apis in terms of industriousness, but different in most other aspects, are the spider remedies. The best known of these is *Tarentula hispania*. The child who might need this remedy tends to be restless and a bit on the thin side. They are very busy. They like to pay attention to details and often excel at mathematics. This is another good question which I usually ask. "What is your favourite subject at school?" The child who needs *Tarentula* usually says "maths". They also like working with their hands and will be good at needlework, knitting, construction games and so on.

They are more irritable than the other children we've considered so far, though, and when they don't get things their way, they can become quite violent, lashing out by kicking or biting. However they respond beautifully to music. Not any kind of music, but music with a strong rhythm. When music with a beat starts to play, they will want to be out of their seats and dancing. They also like an audience, and, unlike the children with the anticipatory fears, they will take every opportunity to get up on the school stage and perform. More than one little girl I've

treated with *Tarentula*, has had medals for winning disco dancing championships!

In homeopathy we use many other spider remedies and one other common one is *Theridion*. This is a remedy which is particularly useful for travel sickness as these children are very sensitive to movement and vibrations. However, there is an interesting symptom which they often have which is about a particular food preference. I remember once asking a little five year-old boy if he had any favourite foods. He replied, "Bananas! Bananas, bananas, bananas! I'd eat ALL the bananas in the world!" Well, it wasn't hard to spot his food preference! The children who respond well to *Theridion* often have such a strong craving for bananas.

Specific conditions

There are many diseases which might appear in childhood, but most children are fundamentally healthy. Maybe the commonest problem is recurrent infections

such as ear infections (see the last issue of *Health & Homeopathy*), coughs, colds and tummy upsets. Homeopathic medicines can be very useful in treating these minor, self-limiting diseases and you can ask your pharmacist for advice in these situations.

One of the commonest chronic problems, which we see in children referred to the homeopathic hospitals, is eczema. The possible homeopathic treatments for eczema include all the remedies discussed in this article so far and many others which might be indicated by a particular child's pattern. This is a difficult condition to treat without professional help so I'd always recommend that you see a homeopathic doctor if your child has troublesome eczema.

Asthma is probably the second most common problem amongst children attending the homeopathic hospitals and it is often a related condition to eczema. It requires specialist treatment even more than eczema does.

If you are going to use any of the medicines mentioned, unless a specific dose is recommended by your homeopathic doctor, use a 30c strength and repeat the doses as often as is necessary.

School children can take homeopathic medicines in the same way as adults do (see page 34). The rule in homeopathy is to take a dose, experience the improvement, then if the improvement starts to decline, repeat the remedy. If a dose does not produce any improvement, then there is no point in repeating that particular remedy.

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