



## PSYCHOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT

Akopyan L.S.

## Nonverbal picture of children's fears

*In this work you can find the results of research of the picture of fears between children of under-school age. As the method of research we used the structural questionnaire of children's fears, created by the author (SODS).*

*In most drawings the tendency of children to calm themselves with the help of another positive-tinged element can be observed. It proves a previously made conclusion about the immanence of self-regulatory processes of feeling fear.*

**Key words:** children's drawings, children's fears, fear portrayal, verbal and non-verbal representation of fears, autoregulation.

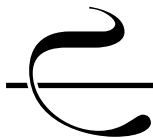
The settled sight at a problem of children's fears as on quite developed (V.I. Garbuzov [8], A.I. Zaharov [9], A.M. Prihogan [15], A.S. Spivakovskaya [17], Jersild A.T., Holmes F.B. [19], Girard-Fresard J. [18] etc.), reflecting a picture of life of more or less stable society, has ceased to be entered in dynamics of swift-flowing events of a public life of Russia of last decades.

Not accidentally, speaking about children, a well-known Russian scientist V.M. Bekhterev allocates «a susceptible and impressionable soul of the child». The author suggests never to forget this exclusive impressionability of the child, especially «in such questions, as protection of mental health. Sometimes words carelessly said in front of the child about a murder or any other terrible incident can disturb a child at night or become a nightmare. That is why conditions and especially environment always make a huge impact on education of the child» [4, p. 153].

V.V. Lebedinsky, O.S. Nikolskaja, etc. underline that every age has "its fears" which in case of normal development disappear with time. Children's fears in case of normal development are the important link in regulation of behavior of the child and, as a whole, have positive sense of adaptation [12, p. 58–70].

The breach in children-parent relations is considered to be one of the most important reasons of occurrence of children's fears. A well known psychologist V.S. Mukhina believes that children's fears arise more often owing to wrong education and unreasonable behavior of adults [13, p. 120–122].

Ignoring and neglect to the child, according to O.A. Karabanovoj, especially adversely affects its development, provoking a wide spectrum of infringements from impulsiveness and aggression to uncertainty in oneself, uneasiness and occurrence of fears [10, p. 68].



V.K. Vilunas thinks that the power of fear “depends on specific features of mental development and concrete social conditions in which the formation of child’s personality is occurred [7, p. 35].

The important advantage of drawing the objects of fear is that in the figurative form those fears which the child aspires to supersede from consciousness can be presented, and they are not always found out in verbal techniques. Children’s drawings can tell us something that is not always possible to put into words. A.I. Zaharov in his works writes, that «through drawings it is possible to understand children’s interests, their deep, not always opened experiences and to consider it at removal of fears» [9, p. 128].

O.A. Prusakova and E.A. Sergienko’s notice that 4-year-old children, drawing the person on a theme «fear», return to the previous stage of development, drawing the image of the head-legs person. A sharp reduction of the quantity of elements of drawing can be noticed. With 5-year-old children the same tendency is observed and at the image of the person feeling fear, they draw as 4-year-old children. The person at the drawing becomes more primitive, and in some cases it does not have important details of a body, drawings on a theme «fear» are extremely poor in comparison with drawings on other themes, frequently it is just the image of a lonely person on the whole sheet. As authors mark, 6-year-old children do not change the image of the person feeling fear. They focus attention not on the fear image, but on how the scared person looks [16].

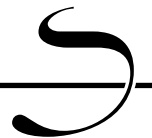
Revealing of specificity of the fears hidden from consciousness of the child (or those fears which are not fully realized), for comparison with verbally expressed fears and definition of optimum strategy and means of rendering psychological help, was the purpose of our research.

The research problems were:

- Definition of figurative presence of various kinds of fears;
- Revealing regulation components in fear images;
- Realization of the comparative analysis of verbal and figurative fears of children living in various conditions of residing.
- Research sample was made by pupils of comprehensive schools of Samara and the Samara region, Sevastopol, and also children living in children’s homes of Samara. 450 children of younger school age have taken part in research.

As a diagnostic toolkit were used the drawing test “My Fear” and the author’s technique of diagnostics of children’s fears (SQCF), that allows to define the maintenance of fears in quantitatively-qualitative, existential measurements; to reveal moral installations of children also in an external estimation of experience of fear (from outside adults, contemporaries), and also self regulation characteristics of fears endured by children (ways of control) [3]. It is necessary to notice that during the process of research children’s fears can be actualized, that is why the conversation-game directed on achievement of emotionally positive condition was spent with every child.

The graphic representation of fears includes not only diagnostic, but also therapeutic aspect on which the drawing methods of correction of children’s fears are



based. As the analysis of children's drawings expands diagnostic possibilities, it allows to compare the data of drawing test with the information received on the basis of verbal techniques.

By quantity of drawings the leading place is occupied by the fear of death. V.V. Abramenkova also points on this: «the theme of death recently takes more and more place in the picture of the world of a modern child». She explains it that «many cultural forms, such as texts of children's folklore are lost or are in degradation stages, and occurrence and a wide circulation of new forms of last decades, for example «black humor», severe «tricks», so-called «sadistic» rhymes, tells us about changes of children's consciousness towards death» [1, p. 14].

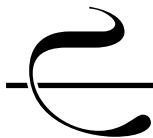
In our research most images are somehow connected with a theme of death. The image of death is often a being with empty eye-sockets on a naked skull, in a bony hand – a plait, black attire; sometimes it is an image of funeral, a coffin, cemeteries or the dead person with bared teeth. Despite various social economic and geographical conditions (Samara, Bolchaja Chernigovka, hero town Sevastopol), children draw these images identically. It is necessary to notice, that in drawings of modern children the characters from Hollywood and Disney films («It», «Strangers», «Mummie» etc.) occurs more often than characters of Russian national fantastic folklore.

The next fear in the rate of occurrence is the image of fear of darkness. Usually all space of a standard sheet of paper is painted over by black, dark blue, violet or red-black color. Under color tests these colors designate alarm; there is also a black square or dark, corners and walls of rooms.

In our sample the considerable quantity of fears of animals is observed. In cities where in every flat there are cats and dogs, hamsters and various small rodents, snakes and lizards-more rare, the same animals cause fear. The greatest number of fears is connected with dogs; in text explanations children notice, that they are afraid not simply of dogs, but of aggressive, big and biting dogs or «evil dog sight». The fear of snakes and spiders is also expressed in a strong degree, especially with girls that coincide with A.I. Zaharova's data. Representing animals, children try to draw it in real-life color (crocodile is green, bears are brown, lions are yellow-sand etc.). But there are drawings where animals that cause fear, are intentionally drawn by motley, iridescent colors as though the child aspires to calm itself with the image of terrible object (the pink or green doggie, the blue-red lion, a blue bear cub etc.).

The picture of educational fears of children of younger school age is presented by drawings of notebooks, consisting of bright red remarks of teachers and the numerous number of poor marks. Drawings where a belt and a mark «2» are represented equally attract attention (fear of a bad estimation and the punishment subsequent to it).

Working over the atlas, we analyzed not only images of fears, but also the topography of children's drawings. In the famous M.V. Osorinoj's work, the general topographical law in the children's drawings is marked and it says that the child «represents sheet space as space of the World which should be definitely organized so it was possible to lodge characters. Underfoot they necessarily should have a ground, and



there should be a sky above a head ... And between heaven and earth characters take places. They stand so that everyone has his own place in all growth and not blocking each other» [14, p. 25]. In our sample there are drawings that confirm this principle, but mostly children do not confirm any principles while drawing. The image of fear in some drawings is displayed without a support, without earth and sky lines, in a certain subjective space. Sometimes this drawing is an image which fills all space of sheet, and sometimes it is a very small, microscopic in relation to the size of sheet, an image of a terrible subject or an object, placed somewhere below, in the corner. The child represents a frightening subject small, insignificant, as though convincing himself in its "unscaryness".

We have noticed the following feature in drawings of socially deprived children. In scary situations the certain supporting elements are drawn in order to rescue, help. The fear to wake up at night and remain alone with fear is drawn by the pupil of children's home as the big black square. As a rule, the fear of darkness is more often represented by dark grey, black color in the form of squares or strongly shaded space of sheet. In some cases the furniture of a room without a personal presence is drawn. But it is necessary to notice, that almost always a window presence with starlight, month or the moon (requirement for heat, protection) is obligatory. The window (aperture) can personify a possible exit (runaway) from a terrible situation.

The results of research show that children struggle with fears in the ways accessible to their mentality: they tame fear or try to cajole it, make it ridiculous, persuade and convince themselves that «it is not scary». It is revealed, that many children while drawing the fear may regulate their emotional condition, for example they paint a terrible image in bright colors, and in some drawings they add details common to themselves (such as elements of clothes etc.) making its identical, as though saying: «It is the same as I am, it will not cause me harm », i.e. actually at drawing of fears some children unconsciously spend "self-therapy". It is necessary to notice, that some girls before drawing the fear say that they wish to draw something good at first. For example at first the princess was drawn and only then old lady Jaga. Some girls represented a positive image after their fears have been drawn. For example, after drawing a terrible shark the girl has drawn the mermaid. This kind of behavior can be considered as one of control ways as an equilibration in situation of negative emotions experience.

Mimic and gesture expression in images of fears are designated as follows: as a rule, it is widely open round eyes, in some drawings pupils are absent or are traced by red color; threateningly opened mouth with a huge teeth. The terrible action itself is represented in the form of a figure of a person with the extended hand in which the knife is clamped, the knife tip is thus painted necessarily over by black or red color, and from this edge blood drops fall down. The afraid child is often represented as follows: corporal component – shoulders are strongly raised, pressed to a head, the neck is involved, hands powerlessly hang along a trunk or are lifted upwards in position "I surrender"; face expression – the ends of lips are lowered downwards, eyes are expanded. Some children do additions to drawings: "Do not kill me, please" or "I see this dream very often, it has



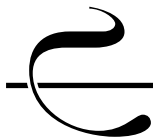
already got me" etc. Children brought up in children's homes choose a passive-defensive position in situations of fear that finds acknowledgement in drawing tests also. At the same time, we were interested by some drawings with the image of fear of depth, fear to sink, where children draw not only a figure of the sinking person in the water, but also the coast with a grass (and it is already a support) where there is a person, ready to come and help, in some cases the person with ring-buoy or any object is drawn. In other drawing, the girl standing on a roof of a high-rise building is drawn, but below the author of drawing has drawn two brothers holding a strong flared-out material. The girl has explained the drawing so, that if the girl falls, brothers will rescue her.

In her researches, V.A. Labunskaja pays attention that in the fear description the signs concerning pantomime and gestures of the person are more often fixed [11].

Numerous children's drawings have shown a huge interest of children towards human body. Representing a situation of fear, children try to transfer the fear felt by the person through movements and actions. On one of drawings the group of children escaping from a cemetery ghosts is represented. Hands of children are scattered, eyes are round with a strong portrayal of pupils, feet are bent in knees, and trunks are cast away back. All characters have no support and soar in air.

The carried out research has allowed not only to expand scientific representation about fears of children of younger school age, but also to reveal distinctions in the maintenance of the fears, caused by social, economic and cultural changes in our society for last decades. Thus that the spectrum of fears, as a whole, has not changed (medical, educational, social, fear of death, fear of animals etc.), the quantitative parity of various kinds of the fears endured by children has changed. The fear of "fall short" according Zaharov A.I., has left the first position, giving way to the fear of death [1, 4]. Fears of modern school pupils have undergone changes in comparison with children's fears during rebuilding period: the maintenance of the social fears stated by children has changed. Social and economic instability affects not only parents, but also finds reflection in the maintenance of fears of children of younger school age ("parents will lose work", "to become beggars", "to become homeless" etc.). Some negative characters ("a black hand", "the queen of spades") are not that popular now. On change by it the new "terrible" characters from horrors come ("It", Dracula, the Mummy, Freddie Kruger and others).

The comparative analysis of realized and unconscious sphere of fears has revealed certain divergences between verbal and figurative forms of expression of fear among children of younger school age. In the verbal form leaders on all sample (on frequency and intensity) are fears of darkness and animals; city children do not have fear of open spaces (the big areas, streets), characteristic for rural children; pupils of children's home unlike children living in families, mark fear "to wake up at night"; in the nonverbal form (thematic drawing) the fear of death and everything that represents the other world prevails. The fear of causing a physical damage and fear of height are typical for city children, but are not observed among rural children. Numerous fears of elements, a fire, hurricane etc. are mostly determined by imagination of city children while the rural children really approached to the nature, are practically prepared for them.



Children of younger school age can independently cope with fear conditions, using different ways of control: active-protective behavior, derivation by different means, calming down; passive-protective behavior, the reference for help to parents, inactivity, the reference to "the higher" forces [5]. In drawings of children a bit different receptions of fear control are traced: transformation of a terrible image in order to make it not scary (reduction, painting the terrible character); "equilibration" of the central image of fear with the image (before or after drawing) with positively painted element (plot). It confirms earlier received by the author conclusion about immanence of self regulation processes in fear experience; the image of the external "support", help from outside, saving objects.

Thus, the nonverbal picture of fears has specific differences for verbally expressed fears of children, both under the maintenance and on types of fear control. That is why in preventive and psychological correctional work with children of the given age it is expedient to use a complex of verbal and nonverbal means of psychological work, accenting in it an independent search of fear control.

### References

1. Abramenkova V.V. The psychology of childhood in the context of child relations development. // Psychology "Questions": – № 1. – M., 2002 (Russian Edition).
2. Akopyan L.S. The atlas of children's fears. – Samara: Publishing House SNZ RAN, 2003 (Russian Edition).
3. Akopyan L.S. The diagnostic of children's fears and anxiety. Methodological manual (publication 2). – Samara: SNZ RAN, 2006 (Russian Edition).
4. Akopyan L.S. Psychological pedagogical research of fears among children of primary school age: Dis. ...cand. of psy. science. – Samara, 2002. – 201 p.
5. Akopyan L.S. Selfregulation of young age pupils in the situation of fear//Personality and existence: subject approach. Materials of science conference, dedicated to A.V. Bruchlinskuy/ Editorial staff. A.L. Guravlev, V.V. Znakov. – M.: University of Psychology RSA, 2008. – P. 432–435.
6. BechtereV V.M. The objective study of personality. Selected works of personality in 2 volumes. – Publishing house – Aleteja, 1999 (Russian Edition).
7. Vilunas V.K.. Psychology of emotional conditions. – M., 1976. – P. 35.
8. Garbysov V.I. Nervous Children. – Medicine, 1990 (Russian Edition).
9. Zaharov A.I. Day and Night fears of children. – Saint-Petersburg, 2000 (Russian Edition).
10. Karabanova O.A. Game in the correction of psychic development of the child. – M., 1997.
11. Labunskaja V.A. Man's expression: communicating and interpersonal cognition. – Rostov-on-Don: Fenix, 1999 (Russian Edition).
12. Lebedinskui V.V., Nikolskaja O.S., Baenskaj E.R., Libling M.M. Emotive disorders in childhood and there correction. – M., 1990.
13. Muchina V.C. Sacrament of childhood. – M., 1997.



14. Osorina M.V. Secret world of children in the space of adult world. – Saint-Petersburg, 2000 (Russian Edition).
15. Prichogan A.M. Anxiety of children and teenagers: psychological nature and age-related dynamics. – M., Voroneg, 2000 (Russian Edition).
16. Prysakova O.A., Sergienko E.A. Representation of emotions in under-school age. Cognitive psychology research // E.A. Sergienko reduction. – M.: Publishing house: The Institute of Psychology RAN, 2004 (Russian Edition).
17. Spivakovskaja A.S. Psychoterapy: game, childhood, family. – Volume 2. – M., 2000 (Russian Edition).
18. Girard-Fresard J. Les peurs des enfants. – Paris, Edition Odile Jacob, 2009.
19. Jersild A.T., Holmes F.B. Childrens Fears // The haddon craftenen, inc. camden,n.j. Copyright, N.Y. by Teachers College, Columbia University, 1935.