
Abstract

The study of a boy who refuses to go to school but overcame hurt to break out of a symbiotic relationship

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This paper describes the process of play therapy with an elementary school boy who refused to attend school unless accompanied by his mother. The clinical material is used to discuss the therapist's function in helping the boy to break out of an enduring symbiotic relationship with his mother. The boy dreaded being hurt by his peers and sought his mother's protection. The mother met his needs to heal her sense of inadequacy in fulfilling her maternal function. This symbiotic relationship of mutually meeting their needs was also enacted during therapy sessions. To encourage the child to break away from this relationship, the therapist needed to understand the relationship from internal and external perspectives: the former, to take on a maternal role, and the latter, to take on a paternal role. It was important for the therapist to fluctuate between these two roles, together with the child. This fluctuation enabled the boy to end his symbiotic relationship with his mother and gain the strength to endure the harm inflicted by the world that lay ahead.

Keywords: symbiotic relationship, school refusal, play therapy
