

## **Psychological and Biological Mechanisms of Child–Mother Separation in Middle Childhood: Implications for Emotional and Social Development**

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### **Abstract:**

Separation from the mother, the child's primary attachment figure, represents a profoundly destabilizing and potentially traumatic experience that increases vulnerability to emotional and behavioral disorders. Maternal separation during early and middle childhood disrupts the developing attachment system, stress regulation, and emotional co-regulation processes. A detailed case study exemplifies these mechanisms through the example of a seven-year-old girl who experienced involuntary enforced separation from her mother following a parental separation. Clinical observations, parent interviews, standardized assessments (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire - SDQ), and a behavioral difficulties diary (log) were analyzed using an integrative approach. Social skills training (SST) observations revealed attachment-seeking and avoidance behaviors, panic responses to familiar adults, social withdrawal, regressive self-soothing (hand-to-mouth), and aggressive acts to regulate tension, alongside pre- and post-intervention assessments showing increases in emotional difficulties (from normal to abnormal) and total difficulties (SDQ score: 6 17), hyperactivity and peer difficulties moving to borderline ranges, and a decline in prosocial behavior (SDQ score: 8 5). These findings demonstrate patterns of attachment disorganization, emotional dysregulation, and representational distortions of self and caregivers, highlighting the profound psychological impact of maternal separation. The case underscores how individual developmental responses reflect broader theoretical models of attachment and stress regulation.