

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder: An Introduction

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) is a developmental disorder diagnosed in children who display extreme disobedient behavior. While all children may go through periods where they reject and rebel against their parents or caregiver's commandments, Oppositional Defiant Disordered children display a level of disobedience that is above and beyond anything that a normal child can produce, both in intensity and duration. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (the clinician's bible for diagnosing mental problems), a child must display a continuing pattern of extreme disobedience lasting for over six months before meriting a diagnosis of ODD. Temper tantrums, talking back to adults, failing to observe rules, provoking others, failing to take responsibility for own actions, and a high degree of irritability and general meanness are all commonly observed and acceptable signs of disobedience.

Most of the time ODD, doesn't develop in a vacuum. Rather, ODD children tend to take on some of the characteristics displayed by their parents or caregivers. ODD is known to be more common in homes where parents chronically fight with one another, and in homes where one or more parents has a history of conduct problems, anti-social behavior, or drug abuse. While parental dysfunction doesn't directly cause ODD, it seems that it helps foster the development and maintenance of ODD symptoms in vulnerable children.

Treatment, usually in the form of individual/child and/or family psychotherapy, is available for ODD. Parental or caregiver involvement in therapy for ODD is quite important. It is much harder to get the ODD child to improve behaviorally if the parents won't change the way they themselves behave – with the child and with one another. Treatment can be important as much for what it prevents, as what it might restore. A significant number of ODD diagnosed children appear to get worse with time, moving into juvenile delinquency and a diagnosis of Conduct Disorder.

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