

The Most Common Behavior Disorders in Children

Raising children is difficult, and raising difficult children can be life disrupting. But **being able to tell whether your child is just going through a stage, or if something is really wrong isn't always that easy.**

A **tantrum** doesn't automatically mean your 2-year-old has a problem with authority, and a **kindergartner who doesn't want to sit still doesn't necessarily have an attention disorder.** When it comes to understanding our children's behavior, experts say **diagnoses and labels should be kept to a minimum.**

Defining "Disorders"

Child psychology experts from the University of Oxford and University of Pittsburgh say that **the term "disorder" should be used cautiously for children up to 5 years old, and question its validity.** Professors Frances Gardner and Daniel S. Shaw say the evidence is limited that problems in preschool indicate problems later in life, or that behavioral issues are evidence of a true disorder. **"There are concerns about distinguishing normal from abnormal behavior in this period of rapid developmental change,"** they wrote.

That being said, a conservative approach to handling behavioral and emotional issues in this age group is best.

Early Childhood Behavioral and Emotional Disorders

Rarely will a child under 5 years old receive a diagnosis of a serious behavioral disorder. However, they may begin displaying symptoms of a disorder that could be diagnosed later in childhood. These may include:

1. **Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**
2. **Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD)**
3. **Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**
4. Anxiety disorder
5. Depression
6. Bipolar disorder
7. **Learning disorders**

Behavior and Emotional Problems

Far more likely than one of the above clinical disorders is that your young child is experiencing a temporary behavioral and/or emotional problem. Many of these pass with time, and require a parent's patience and understanding.

In some cases, outside counseling is warranted and may be effective in helping children cope with stressors effectively. A professional could help your child learn how to control their anger, how to work through their emotions, and how to communicate their needs more effectively. For obvious reasons, medicating children at this age is controversial.

Parenting for Childhood Success

Parenting styles are rarely to blame for childhood behavioral problems. And if you're searching out solutions to help your family cope, that's a pretty good indication that you aren't causing your child's issues. Still, parents play a crucial role in treating early childhood behavioral issues.

When we talk about parenting styles, there are four main types, one of which is most effective in raising well-adjusted and well-behaved children:

1. **Authoritarian parenting: Strict rules with no compromise**, and no input from the children.
2. **Authoritative parenting: Strict rules**, but **parents are willing to listen and cooperate** with their children. More of a democracy than authoritarian parenting.
3. **Permissive parenting**: Few rules, and few demands put on children. There is little to no discipline in this home, and parents typically **take on the role of friend**.
4. **Uninvolved parenting: No rules and very little interaction**. **These parents are detached and may reject or neglect their children.**

Authoritative parenting is most likely to raise well-adjusted and happy children. Uninvolved parents are most likely to raise children lacking self-esteem, self-control, and general competency, say experts.

What we can learn from these parenting styles is that children need clear rules and consequences, but they also need a parent who is willing to listen and guide.

Be Patient with Your Children

Empathy, a cooperative attitude, and a calm temperament are crucial traits for parents to adopt as their child struggles. Also, knowing when to ask for help is key.

If your child's behavior becomes disruptive to the regular running of your household or their education, or if they become violent, it's time to talk to a professional.

Raising children with behavioral problems isn't easy. But before you rush to diagnose them or turn into a strict disciplinarian, reach out for help. Your pediatrician can provide insight into whether your child's behavior is normal for their age, and provide resources for assistance.

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