Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

Dealing with a difficult child can be a hard part of parenthood. Through the years, typical children may go through many phases of challenging a parent’s authority. Their behaviors can be polarized if they are hungry, tired, or upset. The question to ask is when does defiance cross the line of from typical child/adolescent behavior into a diagnosable behavior problem? Medline Plus provides the following definition: “Oppositional defiant disorder is a pattern of disobedient, hostile, and defiant behavior toward authority figures. The pattern must persist for at least 6 months and must go beyond the bounds of normal childhood misbehavior” (Medline Plus, 2005). The University of Virginia has identified the following statistic, “Oppositional defiant disorder is reported to affect between 2 and 16 percent of children and adolescents in the general population”, (UV, 2005). This illustrates the reality and the potential concerns for parents who live with severe behavior difficulties with their children.

What follows is a basic description of the disorder and possible treatment strategies. Where it may be easy to hope that there is a “wonder drug” that can “cure” this disorder, in reality no such drug exists.

Symptoms of ODD (AACAP, 2005):

- Frequent temper tantrums
- Excessive arguing with adults
- Active defiance and refusal to comply with adult requests and rules
- Deliberate attempts to annoy or upset people
- Blaming others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior
- Often being touchy or easily annoyed by others
- Frequent anger and resentment
- Mean and hateful talking when upset
- Seeking revenge

Since other psychological and medical conditions may cause some of the symptoms associated with ODD, a careful assessment is needed to appropriately identify this disorder. The assessment should include looking at factors such as previous diagnosis of ADHD, ADD, Bipolar Disorder, or depression. In many cases the child may have a combination of disorders.

Diagnosis:

Since other psychological and medical conditions may be causing some of the symptoms associated with ODD, a careful assessment is needed to appropriately identify disorder. The assessment should include looking at contributing factors such as another behavioral health condition, (e.g. Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, and Depression). Children may have a combination of disorders.
Strategies for dealing with children:
If you are having difficulty with your children try using these strategies for parenting.

- Set reasonable consequences that can be enforced consistently.
- Use time-outs or breaks if the conflict with your child gets worse, not better.
- Support your child if the child decides they need a time-out or break from a conflict.
- Use positive reinforcement and praise when your child shows cooperation and flexibility.

Strategies for dealing with oppositional behavior in children:
If you are having difficulty with your children, try using these strategies while parenting.

- Set reasonable consequences that can be enforced consistently.
- Use time-outs or breaks if the conflict with your child gets worse, not better.
- Support your child if the child decides he or she needs a time-out or break from a conflict.

Use positive reinforcement and praise when your child shows cooperation and flexibility.

Treatment:
If your child’s symptoms continue even after applying the parenting strategies outlined above, you may want to seek the help of a health care professional. Different forms of treatment may include:

- **Individual therapy**: Individual therapy can be used to improve communication skills, for anger management, to improve problem-solving skills, and to work on impulse control.
- **Family therapy**: Family therapy can help improve family interaction and communication skills within the family system. While working on developing more effective parenting approaches, parents can also receive support and understanding relevant to their situation.
- **Group Parental training courses**: Courses set up to instruct parents on aspects of improving family interaction can be helpful in terms of strategy, as well as to provide an outlet for discussion with other parents in similar situations.
- **Medication**: Medication is usually not recommended for ODD. Medication has been found to help with ODD symptoms when a second diagnosis (for example ADD or ADHD) has been made.

Many ODD children will respond to positive parenting techniques. In most cases families will need to put in hard work into dealing with the disorder. If you have questions or concerns, consult with your child’s pediatrician or family doctor.

References:


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