

Signs & Symptoms of Oppositional Defiant Disorder

Understanding ODD.

Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) is a childhood disorder that is defined by a pattern of hostile, disobedient, and defiant behaviours directed at adults or other authority figures. ODD is also characterized by children displaying angry and irritable moods, as well as argumentative and vindictive behaviours. While all children will display some type of defiant behaviour throughout their growing years, children suffering from ODD will display such behaviours much more commonly than that of any other type of behaviours. For these kids, it can seem like nothing can be done to make them happy. These children will not only do things to purposely cause conflict or to purposely annoy the people around them, but they will oftentimes place the blame on others.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder Statistics

Oppositional defiant disorder is one of the most common behavioural disorders in children. It is estimated that about 10.2% of all children will develop ODD, but the true prevalence of its existence is still debated amongst professionals. It has been said that, prior to the onset of puberty, ODD is more prevalent in boys than it is in girls. However, once puberty has been reached and surpassed, the number becomes more equivalent between the sexes, with the condition being said to occur in about 11% of boys and 9% in girls. Girls, however, tend to display the symptoms of ODD differently than boys will.

Encouragingly, it is estimated that around two thirds of children who are diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder will overcome the vast majority of their behavioural disturbances as they continue to grow older. Some studies have shown that by the age of 18, nearly 70% of children previously struggling with ODD no longer have symptoms of the disorder.

Causes and Risk Factors for ODD

The specific causes that might be attributed to the onset of ODD cannot be narrowed down to any one specific factor. It is widely believed that a combination of factors work together towards causing a person to develop the symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder. The following are some examples of various causes and factors that may play a role in the development of ODD:

Genetic: It is common for children who are diagnosed with ODD to have family members who also suffer from various mental illnesses. Such illnesses can include mood disorders, personality disorders, and anxiety disorders. This fact suggests that there is most likely a genetic component that leads a person to be more susceptible to developing oppositional defiant disorder, as opposed to a person who has not next been exposed to the same type of genetics.

Physical: The presence of oppositional defiant disorder traits have been linked to the existence of abnormal amounts of certain brain chemicals. These brain chemicals, known as neurotransmitters, work towards helping to keep the brain chemicals themselves balanced properly. When an imbalance exists, and messages are suddenly unable to communicate properly with other aspects of the brain, symptoms of ODD may occur.

Environmental: The environment in which a person is raised can have a significant effect on whether or not he or she may fall in to the symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder. If a child is surrounded by a somewhat chaotic home life (where violence, arguments, and other forms of general discord) are prevalent, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the child could begin acting out as a result. Similarly, if children are exposed to violence or have friends who behave in destructive, reckless manners, those children too are more likely to begin displaying behavioral symptoms that correlate with the onset of ODD.

Risk Factors:

- Familial discord
- Dysfunctional home life
- Exposure to violence
- History of mental illness within the family
- Exposure to substance abuse
- Inconsistent parenting (inconsistent discipline, inconsistent interaction, etc.)
- Abuse / neglect

Signs and Symptoms of Oppositional Defiant Disorder

The signs and symptoms of ODD will vary from person to person. There may also be a significant difference in how the symptoms present themselves in boys as opposed to how they are presented in girls. The following are some examples of signs and symptoms that may be evidence that a child is struggling with oppositional defiance disorder:

Behavioural symptoms:

- Easily losing one's temper / throwing repeated temper tantrums
- Arguing
- Fighting
- Refusing to follow rules
- Deliberately acting in a way that will annoy others
- Blaming others
- Blatant hostility towards others
- Being unwilling to compromise or negotiate
- Willingly destroying friendships
- Being spiteful and seeking revenge
- Blatant and repeated disobedience

Cognitive symptoms:

- Frequent frustration
- Difficulty concentrating
- Failure to “think before speaking”

Psychosocial symptoms:

- Difficulty making friends
- Loss of self-esteem
- Persistent negativity
- Consistent feelings of annoyance

Effects of Oppositional Defiant Disorder

Effects can include:

- Social isolation
- Lack of friendships
- An inability to develop meaningful relationships
- Difficulty in educational settings

If the disorder remains untreated, the following effects can result in adults when they have not received the proper help required to manage their symptoms of ODD:

- Ongoing patterns of relationship conflicts
- Trying to control others
- Unable to “let go” of grudges / having difficulty forgiving
- Arguing with authority figures that can result in negative consequences, such as being fired from a job

ODD and Co-Occurring Disorders

Oppositional defiant disorder tends to coincide with the existence of other disorders. Most commonly, children suffering from ODD also tend to suffer from, or experience symptoms of:

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Conduct disorder

Other disorders that may overlap with the presence of oppositional defiance disorder can include:

- Anxiety disorders
- Depressive disorders
- Bipolar disorder
- Intermittent explosive disorder
- Intellectual developmental disorder
- Language disorders

Information taken from Valley Behavioral Website,
<https://www.valleybehavioral.com/disorders/odd/>

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