

Diagnosis.

Only a doctor or mental health professional can diagnose ODD (Clinical Partners, 2018). Patterns of negative behavior are monitored over a 6-month period to identify whether they are consistent enough to allow for an ODD diagnosis (Gotter and Raypole, 2021). However, conduct disorders often go undiagnosed due to the assumption that the behaviors are symptoms of a different additional learning need (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2013).

There is no known cause of ODD. Professionals consider environmental factors as a possible cause (Mayo Clinic, no date). Genetics may also play a part in the chances of a child developing ODD. If a family member has been diagnosed with a behavioral disorder, there is a 50% chance that the child will also develop one themselves (Aggarwal and Marwaha, 2021).

Challenges with diagnosis.

- Behaviors are similar to other additional learning needs such as Conduct Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (NHS Foundation Service, 2018).
- Approximately 10% of ODD cases do not co-exist with another additional learning need (Lanc UK, 2016).
- Diagnosis can take at least 9 months, leaving children and families without support for a prolonged period (Gotter and Raypole, 2021; Early Intervention Foundation, 2022).

Benefits of Diagnosis

- Increases social skills.
- Prevents the child's future being negatively affected.
- Parents and practitioners can offer emotional support.
- Referrals can be made to offer therapy to the child.

(Early Intervention Foundation, 2022).

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD).Introduction.

ODD is described as negative behaviour towards authoritative figures such as parents or teachers (Young Healthy Minds, no date). Symptoms usually present themselves during preschool years, but they can become apparent in older children and adolescents (Mayo Clinic, no 2018).

Symptoms.

- Loses temper easily and often.
- Easily annoyed by other people.
- Deliberately causes upset and annoyance.
- Places blame on others for their own mishaps.
- Lack of compliance when asked to follow rules or requests.
- Vindictive or spiteful.
- Aggressive or violent.

(Mayo Clinic, 2018).

Statistics

- Around 40% of children diagnosed with ODD also have an ADHD diagnosis.
- 67% of children with an ODD diagnosis will have reduced behavioral problems within 3 years.
- 10% of children will develop a long-lasting personality disorder.
- 68% of children diagnosed with ODD will experience a life-long difficulty with impulse control.

(Health Research Funding, 2022).

Therapy to support children with ODD.

- Play therapy – suitable for younger children. This type of therapy offers an emotional outlet for children who find it difficult to express their feelings.
- Family therapy – aimed to support children and their families. Due to the impact ODD has on a child's family, this type of therapy intends to teach effective communication and parenting skills to help families cope after diagnosis. There is research to suggest that this does have a positive impact on families.
- Anger management – aimed to help children who struggle with regulating their emotions. This type of therapy teaches relaxation techniques, how to identify triggers and how to recognize consequences.

(Good Therapy, 2019).

Benefits of Play Therapy.

- Encourages children to learn to regulate their emotions.
- Teaches impulse control.
- Teaches children how to cope in difficult situations.
- Provides children with a sense of responsibility.
- Teaches children to engage in decision making.

(Siegler, no date)

Negatives of Play Therapy.

- Parents may find it pointless.
- The child may not form a trusting relationship with the therapist.
- Can be difficult to interpret the child's play.
- Lack of resources in clinical settings.
- Professionals may have a lack of knowledge or understanding of play therapy.

(OT Kimberly, 2016).

HosseiniKhanzadeh (2017) discusses research that found play therapy, when implemented correctly and based on the child's stage of development, is effective in managing conflict situations.

Barriers.

Davies (2016) informs that children with ODD can cause large amounts of stress within the classroom. This affects not only themselves, but the teaching staff and other students. Burroughs and Barlow (2013) advise teachers and parents to create discussions out of arguments. This provides children with the opportunity to gain self-control and feel that their thoughts and views matter.

Kerkar (2020) informs that lack of management of ODD can lead to dangerous and criminal behaviors later in life. These can include aggressive behaviour towards people and animals, or criminal behaviour such as theft or criminal damage. Early intervention will prevent the chances of these occurring and provide children with a more positive outlook as they transition into adolescence.

Severity of ODD.

According to Mayo Clinic (2018) there are 3 levels of severity of ODD:

- Mild – behavior occurs in only one setting such as school or home.
- Moderate – behavior occurs in a minimum of 3 settings.
- Severe – behavior is evident in 3 or more settings.

American Psychiatric Association (2013) state that the level of severity is what professionals use to plan treatment for the child. Furthermore, it may allow them to identify specific triggers that encourage the negative behaviour.

Conclusion.

ODD is difficult to diagnose. This can be due to the similarity in symptoms to other additional learning needs. Additionally, the prolonged process that children and families must go through to reach a diagnosis and access support can exacerbate symptoms. This can lead to barriers that children face worsening over time and limiting the ability to benefit from available support. When children struggle with their school and home environment, they can feel isolated and react negatively. Therapies offered to children with ODD can be beneficial. Studies show that there are improved patterns of behaviour in children who receive play therapy on a regular basis. However, this depends on the ability of the therapist and whether the child responds to therapy positively. Early intervention is the most important aspect of diagnosing ODD to ensure that support is offered as soon as possible.

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