

What Causes a Child to be Oppositional

Children that have been diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder or ODD are usually very difficult and angry; belligerent children. Parents, teacher, and their peers often do not want a lot to do with them and are often at a loss of how to deal with a child or teenager with ODD. What are the symptoms or behaviors of a child with ODD? Typically they involve a child that gets easily angered, is unkind to others when they are upset or angry, argues with adults, talks back, defies the rules, intentionally bothers those around them, has frequent temper tantrums, gets easily annoyed, and does not follow rules. All children at one point or another in their lives display some of these symptoms, however it is not to the level of extent of a child with ODD.

What exactly causes a child to display these behaviors? The exact nature or cause of Oppositional Defiant Disorder is not currently known. The two most popular theories are that ODD is caused by incomplete development and the second theory suggests that ODD is a learned behavior. Developmental theory indicates that a child did not complete the tasks that a child usually completes a toddler. In essence, this theory suggests that the child has not worked through the stage of development of childhood defiance that usually occurs around the age of two to three years old. The second theory, the learning theory suggests that ODD develops as the direct result of negative interactions they observed during childhood. In either case, parents are not to blame for their child's disobedient behavior.

ODD is not usually diagnosed alone and more than 50% of children with ODD have also been diagnosed with ADHD. Other common disorders that coexist with ODD are affective disorders, mood disorders, personality disorders, and learning disorders. Children that have ODD should be treated for both ODD as well as any co-existing disorders. The symptoms of ODD often exacerbate with the co-existing disorder and vice versa.

Treatment of ODD usually involves medical treatment such as certain medications. Research shows that a number of medications such as Ritalin, Risperdal, and Strattera have been used to treat the symptoms of ODD. In some studies, medication to treat ODD was effective and in other studies it was noted. The main treatment for ODD continues to be psychological intervention, specifically parental intervention. Parents require specific skills in order to maintain themselves and not become increasingly angry and stressed with their child or teenager.

The prognosis for children or teenagers with ODD is as follows:

- 1.) The child will simply grow out of this stage
- 2.) The child or teenager will continue with the ODD symptoms but will not be diagnosed with any co-existing disorder
- 3.) The ODD will be changed to another diagnosis such as ADHD or symptoms that are worse than ODD such as Conduct Disorder or as an adult, Antisocial Personality Disorder
- 4.) The child will develop a different disorder

The best defense for parents with children with ODD is to develop effective parenting skills or strategies to deal with their ODD child, consider medical intervention, and to consult a mental health professional for assistance if needed.

Kara T. Tamanini, M.S., LMHC
Author and Therapist
Founder of Kids Awareness Series
www.KidsAwarenessSeries.com