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The Effects of Behavioral Disorders in Children and Teens

Assessment 7- Research

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Assessment:

An important part of development in children is the assurance of their mental health and well being. One aspect of development in children that is often ignored or goes unnoticed is behavioral issues. Problems involving behavior and cognition can have dire effects on children, causing them mental distress, inability to focus and concentrate, relationship problems, and even physical harm. As a pediatric healthcare worker, it is crucial to not only assess children when they go in for an illness but also to observe their behavior as they grow up. With most family pediatricians, they will often see clients from birth to adolescence; getting a feel for the child's personality traits becomes much easier and noticing changes in that behavior is more obvious

when they work with the patient for such an extended time. Therefore, Pediatricians are often the first to recognize a shift in behavior or issue in the child's development; they play a huge role in the development of the child and can have major impacts on their lives.

In the article, "Problem Behavior in Children and Teens" by Pamela Daniel, the signs and symptoms of behavioral disorders as well as possible treatment plans are described for toddlers, elementary children, and teenagers. Reading this article helped give a glimpse of the important behaviors to watch for in children who are potentially suffering from a mental or behavioral disorder that could be negatively impacting on them. It is important to consider the age of a child when analyzing their symptoms, for example, in toddlers they will often show signs of developmental regression. They will learn to walk and talk much later than the average child and will be unresponsive to the environment around them. Nevertheless, it is extremely important to consider the possibility that this may not indicate a behavioral problem but rather a physical condition, illness, and family situation. Especially at such a young age, diagnosing such behavioral problems are difficult since there are endless other factors that could play into the delayed development of a child. Once the child reaches preschool or elementary school, the signs become slightly more obvious. The child may begin engaging in inappropriate social misconduct such as fighting, aggression, and initiating problems with their other peers at school. The child often performs poorly in school and is hyper-dependent on their guardian. At this point, it is important for parents to seek an opinion from their primary health care provider which is often their Pediatrician. Therefore, as a pediatrician, it is important to properly assess the child and consider all external factors of their situation which may be family problems or learning disabilities. Once these factors are ruled out, a Pediatrician can refer them to do a series of

psychological tests which will more accurately diagnose the child with such a disorder. They can range from ADHD, anxiety, bipolar disorder, childhood depression, and the list goes on. The last age group where behavioral problems may arise is in the adolescent years. Once a child reaches adolescence, they may begin showing signs of a behavioral disorder, or an underlying disorder may heighten and become more severe. Often times, the signs and symptoms are much more severe and can have irreversible consequences and effects. That is why it is always encouraged to try and diagnose children early on, to avoid these issues when they become unrelenting. Teenagers will often show signs of detachment and social withdrawal at school, depression, poor school performance, substance abuse, self-harm, and even thoughts of suicide. Once a child reaches this point, it is crucial for them to seek medically professional help from a psychiatrist. Especially with all the other stressors, teens face such as social pressures and academic exigency, behavioral issues can worsen their mental and physical health significantly and affect the other aspects of their lives drastically.

Article 1:

How do I know if my child is normal?

You may wonder whether your child's behavior is normal or if something serious is going on.

Each age and stage brings its own challenges.

Most children misbehave or are unhappy at times. Your child's behavior may seem different from other children of the same age. Your child may behave unusually or differently from how he has in the past. These changes may be gradual or they may happen suddenly. You need to consider:

- * the age of your child**
- * the kind of problem your child is having**
- * how long the problem has lasted**

Here are some guidelines for problem behaviors at different stages:

Babies, Toddlers, and Pre-school Children: Children develop skills and abilities at different ages. For example, some babies may walk by the age of 11 months, while others do not walk until the age of 15 months. Toddlers learn to walk and talk. You do not need to worry if your child is not developing exactly as other children you observe. However, talk with your child's healthcare provider if your child:

- * is much slower than most children learning to walk, feed himself, or talk**
- * never explores his environment**
- * does not respond to you when you talk or play with him or her**

If you think that your child is not developing normally, see your child's healthcare provider.

The provider will examine the child and ask about symptoms and medical history. The provider may order some tests. The provider may refer your child to a mental health specialist for further tests or treatment. Your child's provider can help find out if the behavior could be caused by:

- * a physical condition such as allergies, hearing problems, or medicine

- * a learning disability

- * changes in the family such as divorce, a new child, or the death of a family member

You can also check out any questions or concerns you have with trained professionals such as your child's preschool teacher.

School Aged Children: It is normal for infants or toddlers to have separation anxiety when apart from their parents. It is much less common for school aged children to be heartbroken when leaving their parents to attend school. Temper tantrums are common for two-year-olds when they don't get what they want. They are not as common in school aged children. Some tantrums can be so extreme that they are frightening.

Children may need professional help if they:

- * have a lot of trouble making and keeping friends

- * show poor social skills, such as fighting or bullying

- * are overly dependent on you

- * are hyper much of the time

- * perform poorly in school or avoid going to school

- * have trouble focusing much of the time, both at home and at school

If your child withdraws from others, seems sad much of the time, and especially if they make any comments about "being better off dead," seek help from a mental health professional right away.

Teenagers: You may have gotten used to having a fairly cheerful, usually compliant school-aged child. You now have a sometimes moody, sometimes defiant teen. You may need support from others to help you make the transition.

Parenting a teenager is a balancing act. You need to balance your actions and attitudes. For example, you still need to provide structure and guidance. However, you should encourage

teens to make their own decisions and become more independent. You should not be overly concerned about your teen's rebelliousness and moodiness. However, you must not underestimate the dangers of problem behaviors.

Examples of the kinds of behavior that may indicate a problem include:

- * socially withdrawing and becoming isolated
- * depression
- * drastic decline of school performance
- * stops caring about personal hygiene
- * odd behavior such as frequently talking to themselves, staying up all night for several nights in a row, or paranoia (thinking that people are out to get them)
- * self-injury (cutting, burning, or head-banging)
- * destroying property or threatening people
- * suspected substance abuse
- * threats of homicide or suicide

Get immediate help if your child:

- * is violent
- * attempts self-injury
- * threatens suicide
- * is completely unable to carry on normal routines

What can I do to help my child?

Know your children well, so that you notice any changes in their behavior. Take an active and regular interest in what your child or teen is doing at school or other activities they enjoy.

Encourage your children to talk about what they are doing. Listen to any worries they might have.

If your child behaves in ways that disrupt daily life, or does things that cause you serious concern, talk with a professional. Getting help early may help avoid more serious problems later on.

Where can I find professional help for my child?

Your child's healthcare provider can refer you to specialists who work with children and teens with behavioral and emotional problems. These may include psychologists, psychiatrists, or social workers.

It is important to find the right therapist for your child. Ask questions and get referrals from people you know and trust, such as:

- * friends or family members who have been in therapy
- * your child's pediatrician
- * your child's school psychologist or guidance counselor
- * your employee assistance program (EAP) through your employer
- * community mental health agencies
- * community human service agencies (Social Services, Catholic Charities, Lutheran Family Services)
- * university departments of psychology, social work, or child development (Universities often have training centers for graduate counseling students. The students see community members and charge a minimal fee.)
- * professional associations such as:
 - ** American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy
 - ** American Psychiatric Association
 - ** American Psychological Association
 - ** National Association of Social Workers

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