

Difficult Children -

The Need For Integrated Community Responses

Difficult Behaviors Defined

- Behaviors that cause significant concern or conflict with peers, teachers, adults, parents, HHS personnel, law enforcement, judicial system, members of the community, etc.
- Include
- lying, stealing, fighting, verbally abusive behaviors, truancy, drug or alcohol abuse/dependence, curfew violations, anger problems, defying rules, disrespect for rights of others, cruelty to animals or people, fire setting, bullying, threats, intimidation, use of weapon, forced sexual activity, inappropriate sexual activity, vandalism, burglary, manipulation, running away, loses temper, argumentative, teases or annoys others, easily offended or angered, resentful, spiteful, blames others for mistakes, denies responsibility for behaviors, etc, etc..

Difficult Behaviors – DSM-IV

- Conduct Disorder
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Disruptive Behavior Disorder
- Reactive Attachment Disorder
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
- Anxiety Disorders
- Depressive Disorders
- ADHD
- Pervasive Developmental Disorders (e.g., Autism & Asperger's)
- Mental Retardation
- Impulse Control Disorder
- Substance Abuse or Dependence

Defining Best Practices or Evidence-Based Practices

- If you “Google” Best Practices or Evidenced Based Practices you will uniformly find that the treatment of physical, emotional, and behavioral disorders involve treatments that intervene at multiple levels or across multiple domains.
- These approaches may be called multidisciplinary, systemic, biopsychosocial, community-based, or any number of labels but share in common interventions across domains known to have causal or mediating relationships with the issue in question

Difficult Children – Best Practices or Evidence Based Practices

- Effective Treatment is “Systemic” in nature. It involves working with the multiple influences in a child’s life:
E.G., The Child, Family, School, Peer Groups, and Community
- Duration of treatment should be long enough and intensive enough to be effective. In CD the earlier the onset the longer and more intensive the treatment.
- Effective interventions involve integrating the activities of major influences in a child’s life. I.E., integrating the activities of family, school, HHS, law enforcement, judicial system, probation/parole, counselors, psychologists, physicians, church, etc.

Examples of Systemic Behavioral Interventions

- Cognitive/Behavioral Interventions have been shown to be the most effective in treating CD/ODD behaviors.
- Children with these disorders often have cognitive skill deficits, social skill deficiencies and cognitive distortions
- Interventions target communication, problem-solving skills, impulse control, anger management
- Cognitive/Behavioral interventions include cognitive therapy techniques for the child and behavioral management techniques for family and other agents of change, and modelling strategies for use by family, school, mentors, peers, and other agents of influence.

Systemic Behavioral Interventions

Cont'd

- Developmental Considerations are also a factor in determining how to apply cognitive/behavioral technologies
- Cognitive techniques require some level of insight and verbal ability and are best suited to children 13-18 years of age
- Children 5-11 years of age benefit most from Behavior management strategies and modelling.
- Girls may be more comfortable expressing thoughts and feelings and boys may benefit more from experiential approaches such as role playing

Systemic Interventions cont'd

- Parent Training involves education regarding the nature of CD/ODD and how to apply behavioral management strategies. Parents can also be instructed on the behaviors and interventions being used in the individual therapy.

Parents need to have some level of motivation in order for this to be successful

- Any source of influence can be involved in the process of identifying problems and learning cognitive/behavioral techniques for responding to the problem behaviors.

Integrated Responses

- Research has shown that individual cognitive therapy combined with parent training approaches is far more effective than either approach offered in isolation
- Integrating responses from the major influences in a child's life greatly enhances success beyond that obtained from the combination of individual and family therapies.
- The most effective interventions integrate responses from family, school, peer group, church, HHS, parole/probation, judicial system, and other sources of influence

Integration Continued Page 2

- The Grand Island School district received a large grant some three years ago. The grant allowed the addition of mental health and social work services within the school system. This allowed integrated responses to be facilitated by the school
- The approach has been so successful in reducing behavioral and academic problems, truancy, and drop out rates that the district will continue to fund the program once the grant has ended

Integration Continued Page 3

- Integration requires open communication between those who are centrally involved in the life of the child
- Communication should lead to each participant providing their view of the child's strengths and weaknesses and the parameters of what they can offer in way of intervention and/or support
- Shared goals that are mutually supported and reinforced are essential
- Each influential person than can decide what they are able to provide in respect to the shared goals
- Experts in specific areas of intervention can elicit support from other members of the team or they can train members in ways that they can implement the intervention the expert has devised

For example, the team can devise a list of target problem behaviors and all members of the team can respond to the behaviors when they are observed

Integration Continued Page 4

- An example of an integrated plan was offered in a monograph produced by Doctors Linda Baker and Karen Scarth –
 - * after-school structured group to teach self-control and problem-solving techniques
 - * 12 parent training sessions to teach effective parenting skills
 - * family counseling
 - * in-home academic tutoring
 - * school advocacy and teacher consultation
 - * victim restitution
 - * individual befriending to other boys with structured community-based activities
 - * continuing groups



Obstacles to Implementation

- We are all very busy with full and complex schedules
- Lack of an identified coordinator
- Absence of formalized or structured formats for organizing integrated activities
- Lack of knowledge of the scope and nature of each others skills and proficiencies
- Separate justice system and mental health paths for children with behaviors addressed by both systems
- Funding
- Adequate personnel
- Etc., Etc., Etc....