



Fintan O'Regan

Behaviour Management & Consultancy

More help for parents needed to help manage conduct disorders and antisocial behaviour, says NICE and SCIE



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Welcome back.

Last month we highlighted the issue of Conduct Disorder and so it is quite a co-incidence that for the first time within the UK that I at least can recall that this term has achieved such official recognition.

The following is an account of their findings of a recent article on the issue.

Conduct disorders are a serious, but frequently unrecognised mental health condition in children and young people". A [new NICE guideline](#) highlights the central role of parents and guardians in the management of conduct disorders and antisocial behaviour, recommending specific training sessions to help support parents and carers.

Conduct disorders are characterised by repeated and persistent misbehaviour much worse than would normally be expected in a child of that age. This may include stealing, fighting, vandalism and harming people or animals. These disorders are the most common reason for children to be referred to mental health services, with around 5% of all children aged between 5 and 16 years diagnosed with the condition. Conduct disorders also often coexist with other mental health disorders, most commonly attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

NICE, the healthcare guidance body, has today published a clinical guideline on the recognition and management of antisocial behaviour and conduct disorders in children and young people. This guidance has been developed jointly by NICE and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE).

Professor Gillian Leng, Deputy Chief Executive, NICE, said: "Conduct disorders, and associated antisocial behaviour, are the most common mental and behavioural problems in children and young people - around half of children with a conduct disorder not only miss out on parts of their childhood but go on to have serious mental health problems as adults. The new NICE guideline is the first national clinical guideline in this area and includes a number of recommendations to support healthcare professionals to accurately diagnose and treat conduct disorders. It aims to significantly improve the lives of young people with a conduct disorder, which is a serious but frequently unrecognised mental health problem."

Professor Stephen Pilling, Director, National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health; Professor of Clinical Psychology and Clinical Effectiveness, UCL and facilitator of the Guideline Development Group, said: "Conduct disorder has real consequences for the child and their families, schooling is disrupted, family life can become very stressful and problems with

drug and alcohol misuse and the criminal justice system are common. But the problems associated with conduct disorder are often lifelong; with adults who had a conduct disorder during their childhood being far more likely to develop another mental health disorder when they are an adult - nearly half go on to develop antisocial personality disorder. The costs to individuals, families and society of untreated conduct disorder are enormous.

"The new guideline highlights the importance of supporting the child's parents or guardians in the treatment of the condition - recommending training programmes tailored specifically for them - as aspects of parenting have been repeatedly found to have a long-term association with antisocial behaviour. Many parents do an excellent job in caring for a child with a conduct disorder, but it can be incredibly challenging. Parent training programmes provide them with strategies for dealing with difficult children and how to better handle them going forward."

Andrea Sutcliffe, Chief Executive, Social Care Institute for Excellence, said: "The lives of children and young people with conduct disorder can be devastatingly affected so it is clearly vital that they have access to an accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment. It is important not to concentrate solely on their clinical needs but also to consider their whole lives - as part of a family, school and local community. That is why it is crucial that everyone in health, social care and education work well together to provide the information and person-centred care necessary to improve the quality of life and life chances for children, young people, their families and carers."

Professor Peter Fonagy, Chief Executive, Anna Freud Centre, Freud Memorial; Professor of Psychoanalysis, UCL and member of the Guideline Development Group, said: "All children can be naughty, defiant and impulsive from time to time, which is perfectly normal. However, some children have extremely difficult and challenging behaviours that are outside the norm for their age. Recognising and accurately diagnosing a conduct disorder is vital to ensuring children and their families are able to access the treatment and support they need to manage the condition."

"A number of effective interventions have already been developed for children with conduct disorder and related problems. However, uptake of these programmes has been variable. Treating conduct disorders needs all those agencies that can help to work together - this includes healthcare, education and social care, as well as the criminal justice system if needs be. We hope that the development of NICE guidance in this area will help ensure that children and their families receive the best possible support, wherever they live."

Fiona, mother of a child with a conduct disorder, said: "Caring for a child with a conduct disorder can be incredibly challenging. It is not just the child who is affected by a conduct disorder; it can have a significant impact on their brothers or sisters, their parents, family members, teachers and other people they come into contact with. Real practical support and advice is needed to help parents manage their child's condition, such as what to say to calm the child when they are very distressed to avoid inflaming the situation. I hope that this guideline will

help people understand more about conduct disorders, and help parents improve their child's quality of life."

Recommendations include:

- **Initial assessment of children and young people with a possible conduct disorder:**
Assess for the presence of the following significant complicating factors:
 - a coexisting mental health problem (for example, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder)
 - a neurodevelopmental condition (in particular ADHD and autism)
 - a learning disability or difficulty
 - substance misuse in young people.

- **Parent training programmes:** Offer a group parent training programme to the parents of children and young people aged between 3 and 11 years who: have been identified as being at high risk of developing oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder or have oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder or are in contact with the criminal justice system because of antisocial behaviour.
- **Child-focused programmes:** Offer group social and cognitive problem-solving programmes to children and young people aged between 9 and 14 years who: have been identified as being at high risk of developing oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder or have oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder or are in contact with the criminal justice system because of antisocial behaviour.
- **Improving access to services:** Provide information about the services and interventions that constitute the local care pathway, including the:
 - range and nature of the interventions provided
 - settings in which services are delivered
 - processes by which a child or young person moves through the pathway
 - means by which progress and outcomes are assessed
 - delivery of care in related health and social care services[1].



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For some time I have been advocating the term SEBD or Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties is too broad a term and that it needs to target more specific needs for young children in order to provide specific strategies and resources for support.

This is a significant step in the right direction.

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