

[Understanding A Child's Nature](#) [1]

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Have you heard of ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder)? This disorder, supposedly existing in certain children, has recently been redefined and updated by “experts” in the field of psychiatry. It is characterized by angry, irritable, argumentative, defiant, disobedient, hostile, and vindictive behavior toward others, predominantly adults, especially authority figures.

In order to be labeled ODD, this type of behavior must be their lifestyle or “pattern” (lasting for up to six months) and not just an isolated occurrence, (here and there, or once in a while), but rather happening on a regular or daily basis. Additionally, it must be manifested as a package deal, including a minimum of four of the defined categories of “anti-social” behaviors. (This certainly sounds both dire and confusing at the same time).

The expectation is that individuals should not confuse ODD with any one of the other bewildering myriad of so-called “disorders” associated with children’s anti-social behavior. CD (Conduct Disorder) is recognized when a child violates the basic rights of others and expresses all-inclusive anti-social behaviors or “conduct that is out of order”, whereas the other labels for disorders in children usually define more specific anti-social behavior. ADHD (Attention Deficit-Hyperactive Disorder) defines a child that cannot be calmed down, made to listen, or “pay attention”. DAD (Disinhibited Attachment Disorder) defines children that seem to be plagued with attention seeking, and indiscriminate friendliness.

Then there is RAD (Reactive Attachment Disorder). This specified type of anti-social behavior is usually observed in children who have not formed strong social bonds with their caregivers. This so-called disorder seems to be a current developing issue gaining prevalence and popularity among a number of conservative, Anabaptist groups here in the U.S.

In the past, this view would have been more localized among certain individual families, but as time moves on there seems to be a concerted effort among those who have foster and adopted children to accept and promote this secular viewpoint. There are many support groups, annual meetings, and numerous newsletters all geared towards these specific families and their seemingly “specialized” struggles. There is no doubt that the struggles are real; however, in the midst of reaching out for answers, some, if not many of these families have become more and more susceptible to the “wisdom of this world” on these matters.

More and more children in our culture are being diagnosed with one disorder or another, i.e., a condition that is not normal or healthy. These disorder “labels” call for therapies. Therapies are: special treatments of a given diagnosis, counseling, and/or medications. Disorders require “experts” to analyze or evaluate what is the cause and cure of a certain specified so-called “abnormal behavior”. In the world of professionalism, there is a rising concern that the baseline of “normal” children in our society seems to be shrinking.

What should the Christian do with this flood of philosophies? What should we believe about raising children with diverse personalities? Since the “experts” believe children’s behavior is from a genetic, organic, or environmental base, should we then change our basic child training beliefs and methods? Are children therefore, victims of forces outside of their, or their

parents', control?

Might a diagnosis which produces a label, influence a parent to stop believing that his or her child is responsible for their behavior? What if the child begins to believe that they have no ability to take responsibility for their actions or that they cannot choose to be something different than that which their lower nature (natural inclination) would dictate?

The following principles are a summary of the timeless truths of the Bible. If we want to "endure unto the end", we must believe these principles in our hearts, practice them in our families, and teach them in our churches.

Each child in the ultimate sense is created in the image of God.

We believe the Biblical account of creation and that God created Adam and Eve in His own likeness and image (Genesis 1:26-27). Also, that Adam's sons were born in his own likeness and image, (Genesis 5:3). Hence, the human spirit and personality is a replication of God Himself. We are not the result of random chance, mutations, and evolution. Moreover, when each child is created in the womb, God personally oversees His creation and has infinite thoughts for each one (Psalm 139:13-19).

The product of this divine creation is that each child is incredibly complex, resilient, and gifted. There are receptors in each soul that are capable of: connecting the child with teachings about God, and forming a personal relationship with Him.

Each child is hopelessly corrupted and bears the image of Adam's fallen nature.

Romans 5:12 informs us that "by one man sin entered into the world" and that "death passed upon all men." The psalmist himself acknowledged that he was "shapen in iniquity" and that the wicked speak lies "as soon as they be born." In Ephesians 2:3 we are informed that "we ... were by nature children of wrath, even as others."

From infancy, children are incredibly selfish. Sometimes they cry even when nothing is wrong, usually just wanting attention or their own way. In toddlerhood, the fallen human nature comes out with all its ugly expressions. Post-modernism has introduced and interjected many legal and political terms in place of traditional, Biblical terms such as: selfishness, meanness, violence, dishonesty, deceitfulness, etc.

Defining traits by giving them subjective terms such as "issues" or "disorders" does not change the "source" nor the "nature" of the behavior. We should not be surprised by ungodly human behavior nor should we sensationalize it (make a big deal out of it). Biblically speaking, we should expect that children will tend to respond out of their lower (Adamic) nature!

The solution for raising all children is a balance of love and discipline.

Couples should enter parenthood with unconditional love and acceptance for the children God chooses to give them. In the season of life, during young adulthood, God has planned for this investment into the next generation. God knows how much children need parents, and

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perhaps even more, how much parents need children. (This is not to place a negative view on barrenness nor the reaching out for children in adoption. In fact, this pattern speaks of larger-than-life principles—how each one of us, as a believer, is adopted into God's family.)

Each child (even a handicapped child) should be treasured and given a Biblical baseline of love and acceptance. His needs should be met and love poured into his life. Along with this, as much as God blesses, children should be raised among brothers and sisters. Children tend to receive infinite corrections to their human selfishness by living with each other. They learn socialization skills even without knowing they are learning them.

In early toddlerhood, when the human nature traits of selfishness begin to emerge, parents will need to choose to confront each child's personal Adamic nature. The Bible gives us the God-ordained pattern of using the rod. Discipline should be for the child's needs and should be consistent with the specified disobedience. A spanking should not be considered a big deal, but rather it should be seen and understood as the Biblical method of correction, restoration, and cleansing the child's conscience, when it is administered the Bible way. Spanking half a dozen times in the same day for the same issue is not necessarily abnormal, it is just a normal process for some children—children with certain traits that God has gifted for a purpose He alone understands.

If oft repeated spanking for the same offense does not seem to be producing godly change, then maybe the whole situation should be reevaluated Biblically. Is father or mother's example of life inconsistent with the expected change in the child? Are they disciplining in anger or in some other way "provoking the child to anger"? Perhaps they are not together on the issue in question therefore sending the child a mixed message. What if one of them is out of their God-ordained position of headship order in the home, therefore causing the child confusion about what is expected?

However, this personal evaluation should never discourage parents from faithfully applying Biblical discipline. The goal is to train each child to hearken to wisdom outside of his inner self. The Bible makes it clear that if a child is left to hearken to his inner wisdom, he will come to destruction (Proverbs 29:15). Children who learn to hearken to the voice of wisdom that "crieth without" (Proverbs 1:20) and who learn to listen to [hear and obey] their parents, other authorities, and even each other, can arrive at a place of enjoying a pleasant existence in this life (Ephesians 6:2-3).

Sometimes parents raise questions about the exceptional child. "We have normal children," they say, "but here is one that clearly is the exception. How shall we treat this child?" The fact is, exceptional children are normal too! It may be that their high maintenance requires greater doses of love and discipline. The worst stigma a parent can place upon a child is the idea that he has conditions and/or traits that are unmanageable. Fathers and mothers, please do your child a favor. Let him know you love him with all your heart, but let him also know that you will not accept it if he does not hearken to your voice. You simply will not cease discipline until he submissively and happily obeys your directions.

If you missed this foundational platform when your child was young or perhaps succumbed to the idea that "my child needed to be treated differently than normal," you can always go back and admit this to him. He will benefit by your confession and repentance at any stage of life, if you honestly and humbly acknowledge that you failed to bring his will into submission as clearly taught in Scripture. Since he is created in the image of God, he can still choose the way

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of submitting his will to God, even though it will be much more difficult than if you would have taken your stand in those early days.

Ultimately, being converted, being born again, and receiving God's new nature is the only hope for each and every human being. Jesus' death and resurrection provides a miracle of transformation in the human heart. Godly training lays a platform, but it can never replace the new birth. Poor training with obvious needs may actually drive a person to see his need of conversion more completely. The fact remains, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [creation]" (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is not a once and done experience. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23). This is a day-by-day miracle as we walk with God through His Word and live a life of routine (whenever we fall) repentance.

Renaming and redefining human nature does not change anything! Each and every disorder that experts and professionals claim to see and understand today, can be recognized in the historical, human record of the Bible. This so-called "abnormal" behavior can be identified in the familiar accounts of Cain, Joseph's brothers, King Saul, Absalom, Judas, and others. The positive attributes of human behavior can be recognized in the accounts of others such as Noah, Daniel, the Hebrew boys, Nehemiah, Peter, Paul, and many others.

ODD, ADHD, and RAD are indeed interesting and novel terms. But the same needs of the heart and human behavior have always been here with us. Thank God for the Bible, our only "unadulterated" and "unchanging" guide through the "changing" philosophies of this world.

Editor's Note:

This article was originally printed in the Pilgrim Witness under the title "ODD". In order to clarify some points and to update the information, some editing changes have been made by the editor of the Berean Voice, with permission and approval of the author.

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