



Disorders of Affect

Fact Sheet

Summer 2009

Condition Description

Disorders of Affect are formal mental health diagnoses given to an infant or toddler by a licensed mental health professional using the Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood: Revised Edition (DC:0-3R). The diagnoses require that the young child is demonstrating extreme difficulty in regulating emotions. The difficulty in regulating emotions may either be generalized to numerous situations and individuals or to specific individuals or situations.¹

Impact on Learning and Development

If untreated, young children with Disorders of Affect may experience delays in development and demonstrate difficulties in their relationships with others. They may also demonstrate difficulties in later school achievement and develop behaviors that require juvenile corrections interventions.^{2,3}

Treatment Options

While the research surrounding effective treatment options is minimal, experts in the field recommend a combination of psychotherapy and parent education.⁴ Additionally, as with all interventions targeted toward young children, consistent and frequent communication across all of the systems working with the child (the child's primary care givers, child care providers, primary health care providers, mental health providers, etc.), is essential for optimal success in treatment.⁵

References

- ¹ Zero to Three (2005). Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood: Revised Edition. Washington: ZERO TO THREE Press.
- ² Zigler, E., Taussig, C., & Black, K. (1992). Early childhood intervention: A promising preventative for juvenile delinquency. American Psychologist, 47(8), 997-1006.
- ³ President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. (2003). Goal 4: Early mental health screening, assessment and referral to services are common practice. Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America. 57-66.
- ⁴ Zero to Three (1997). Disorders of affect. In A. Lieberman, S. Wieder & E. Fenichel (Eds.), DC: 0-3 Case Book (pp.47-180). Washington, D. C.: ZERO TO THREE.
- ⁵ Parlakian, P. and Seibel, N.L. (2002). Building Strong Foundations, Practical Guidance for Promoting the Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Toddlers. Washington: ZERO TO THREE Press.