

Defining emotional and behavioral disorders

Psychology, Behaviorism



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In order to move forward clinically or in research to address the problem of emotional and behavior disorders one must first have a solid definitive grasp on the nature of the problem and what it ultimately is, definitionally.

Unfortunately, there's no universally accepted definition for emotional and behavioral disorders.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines the disorder as follows: “ a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance: An inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems” (Council for exceptional, 2011). The federal definition also includes those children who have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, but excludes children who are socially maladjusted unless they are seriously emotionally disturbed (Ibid). Gargiulo points out that although research continue to argue over a concrete definition of emotional and behavioral disorders, there are some common denominator/factors in the various definitions.

He indicates four key factors that an individual must exhibit that will contribute to diagnosis of emotional and behavioral disorder. 1. There must be a high frequency (or rate) at which the behavior occurs. 2. The high

intensity of the behavior. 3. The length or duration of the behavior. And 4. The age appropriateness of the behavior (Gargiulo, 2006). The terms emotional and behavioral disorders, mental disorders, emotional disturbance, behavioral disorders, and mental illness are all umbrella terms that are often used interchangeably in the field and in the literature.

Beneath these terms, there is a wide range of specific conditions all different from one another in their characteristics and in their treatment (National dissemination center, 2010). Some examples of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders are, adjustment disorder, anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, selective mutism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, anorexia nervosa disorder, bipolar/manic depressive disorder, major depressive disorder, and anxiety disorder.