

Who's Got The Right Diagnosis? ADD, ADHD, ODD, LIES

Tom Garfield discusses a Biblical approach to modern “disabilities”, and their treatment, in this “Dear Parents” article.

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“They interrupt...they don't follow directions. In short, they do what seizes them at the moment without thinking through the consequences.”

“Accept the fact that it is a handicap...don't expect your child to behave like others.”
(Sandra Doran, on children with “ADHD”; Focus On the Family)

“Even a child is known by his deeds, whether they are pure and right.”

“Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.”
(God, on children with sin natures; the Bible, Prov. 20:11, Col. 3:20)

I. History of “Disabilities”:

A. Personal experience:

When I was doing my student teaching at Moscow High School a “few” years ago, as part of my experience I was assigned to regularly teach art to a group of handicapped students. I grew very fond of these students and we had an all too short time together. We were able to complete the painting of a pretty nifty wall-mural, though. Among these students were kids in wheelchairs, kids with Down's Syndrome, and others with a variety of mental and physical problems. However, they had at least a couple of things in common; one was they all had medically provable disabilities, the second was that they all had a generally cheerful and compliant spirit. I had few discipline problems with them, after the class rules were made clear.

B. General history – handicaps were medically identifiable, treated as such, then mainstreaming, growing demand for “equal education” coupled with increasingly poor education = Learning Disabilities growth of special ed, follow the money!

In the years since the days of real handicaps there has been a flood of previously undetected “disabilities” diagnosed. It reminds one of FDR's “alphabet soup” of programs to fix the economy during the Depression. Considering his legacy, the comparison is not a bad fit.

C. Definitions: LD, ADD, ADHD, and my favorite, a relatively new release, ODD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder. Quotes from advertisement for workshop: “Symptoms – Lose their temper? Argue with adults? Deliberately do things that annoy others? Blame others for their own mistakes? Are touchy or easily annoyed by others? But ODD students are not merely misbehaving, difficult young people. They are often sensitive, intelligent, capable students who need someone to help unlock their potentials.” Workshops? Diagnosis and medical management of ODD students. The underlying and sometimes unseen causes of ODD. Attitudinal Therapy techniques.”

The symptoms for these afflictions read as specifically as your daily horoscope: “Your fellow workers need your timely input today.” “Today holds many challenges for you, do your best in decision making and your future will be bright.” “To avoid explosive situations, don't smoke around gas pumps.” What kind of diagnoses are these? Just about every kid and virtually every adult male I know could be labeled ADD, if not ADHD, but most certainly ODD at some time or other. The next one I trust we'll see is the unabashed – LIES – Learning Isn't Essential Syndrome, which already afflicts millions of students as well as teachers. The truly ironic aspect to this is that all these recently revealed “handicaps” are being brought to us by the same establishment that has produced over twenty million functionally illiterate adults in the last twenty-five years. Doesn't it strike you as odd that we are able to simultaneously produce the most poorly educated generation in our country's history and

yet “discover” all these subtle, mysterious learning and behavioral problems that previous generations failed to notice? How can we know so much about children’s brains and their learning capabilities and yet have a lower proportion of reading adults than 100 years ago? Not to mention behavioral problems that would cause the hair of any prior generation of teachers to turn white!

II. Treatment (as in illness) vs. Solution (as in problem) options:

In one sense, this epidemic of pathetic diagnoses is predictable and understandable. It is hard to see children struggle with a problem. Education in this country has, particularly in the last 130 years, caused a great deal of suffering of children. When one of our children is having problems, whether it is difficulty learning the multiplication tables or a cough that won’t go away, as loving parents we will seek a way to help this little one. What parent or teacher can sit by and calmly watch a child suffer? But before we act, doesn’t it make sense to try to diagnose the real problem? We don’t put a band-aid on a child’s sore throat or give them Tums for a scraped knee. So, if it is an illness or medical problem we look for medical solutions, not solutions as in dealing with a correctable problem such as misbehavior. Today, all sorts of “experts” will tell us what is best for our children, especially when it comes educating them. Doesn’t it make sense to listen to someone who has not only vast experience, but successful experience with solving problems like the ones we see? Who would take their child to a doctor whose success rate was less than 50%? Yet vast numbers of parents, even Christian parents, seek advice on raising and educating children from “professionals” who have an even worse rate of true accomplishment. One of the most distressing interviews I heard on tape was a panel discussion conducted by no less an honorable man than Dr. James Dobson on the issue of ADD. Parents and experts swapped sad tales of ADD’s inevitable affect on their children. What to do? And over and over the lament – “We did all we could to be good parents.” What about seeking out non-”professional”, but very successful godly parents and grandparents for advice that has meat in it.

So how is it to be treated? What prescription is offered? Obviously, discipline is to be withheld, in direct contradiction to biblical admonitions for addressing bad behavior. You don’t punish a child for having a cold, why would you punish them (or their parents) for a mental or personality syndrome? This trend really shouldn’t be that surprising since we live in a culture that is actively seeking new names and causes for old sins. Drunkenness, homosexuality, even spewing foul-language has now been “linked” to genetics. God calls them sin; the world calls them syn-dromes.

One pandemic-wide, money-making, answer then – drug them into submission. What began thirty years ago as concern for just the students’ problems with understanding lessons has descended to encouraging drug abuse in a last ditch effort to control behavior! The drug of choice is the increasingly popular Ritalin, an amphetamine. One doctor has written a book, a big one, calling for an anti-drug campaign in treating these LDs: (Quotes from Talking Back to Ritalin by Dr. Peter Breggin)

“Ritalin is a form of speed”

“The US Drug Enforcement Administration has issued a warning that Ritalin is highly addictive and a common drug of abuse comparable to amphetamine and cocaine”

“There is no convincing evidence that children with ADHD have anything physically wrong with them.”

“The attention deficit is not in the child, but in us as adults. We need to find new and better ways to meet the child’s needs, and we must find the will and time to do so. In modern America, there is little incentive to spend time with children and a great deal of incentive to spend time at other activities, including ‘making a living.’”

III. Loving vs. Hating Children

A. God is not silent on educating children. Before we accept child-training advice, much less drugs, from a God-hating, child-killing culture, shouldn’t we at least examine God’s Word? What are some of His principles

for educating all children? They include: loving, patient discipline, nourishment within order, punishment of disobedient behavior, patience with the weak, constant repetition of necessary instruction, modeling in all things, allowing maturity to take its course – not circumventing it or forcing it, giving them what they NEED, not what they always want – taking the long view of education- “when he is old...”

God loves our children even more than we do; wouldn't it make sense to consistently, not sporadically, trust and practice His methods? We in the late twentieth century, for all our technology and degrees, have not discovered fundamental things about training our children that our blessed Father forgot or neglected to tell us in His Word. No, the Bible does not tell us directly how to help a child struggling with math, but it does directly tell us why children misbehave the way they often do. It also clearly tells us parents what to do for our children. When consistently heeded, God's diagnosis and prescriptions will never fail to produce lasting benefits for our precious children. He promised.