Overview: Disruptive, Impulse-Control, and Conduct Disorders

Behavioral disorders and addictive behaviors aren't inter-changeable. Understanding the distinction changes treatment.

What Are Disruptive Disorders?

Disruptive, Impulse-Control, and Conduct Disorders are conditions marked by difficulty regulating emotions and behaviors—particularly anger, aggression, and defiance. Unlike momentary frustration or occasional rule-breaking, these disorders involve persistent patterns that harm relationships, careers, and often lead to legal issues.

Understanding Disruptive Disorders

Intermittent Explosive Disorder (IED)

Repeated episodes of impulsive aggression—verbal outbursts or physical acts—that are grossly out of proportion to the situation. Sometimes followed by relief or remorse.

- Explosive rage incited by minor frustrations or perceived slights
- Property destruction, physical altercations, or verbal tirades
- Regret after outbursts, with promises that it won't happen again

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

Persistent pattern of angry, irritable mood combined with argumentative, defiant behavior toward authority figures.

- Chronic irritability and frequent loss of temper
- Frequent arguments, and a refusal to comply with rules
- Blaming others for their own mistakes or misbehavior

Conduct Disorder

Repetitive pattern of behavior that violates the rights of others or major societal norms. Frequently precedes adult antisocial behavior and substance use disorders.

- History of aggression toward people or animals, including bullying, fighting, or cruelty
- Destruction of property, theft, or serious rule violations
- Deceit and manipulation to obtain what they want or avoid consequences

Prevalence:
4-7% of U.S. adults[1]

Co-Occurrence:
47% of adults with Oppositional Defiant Disorder develop an SUD[2]

Treatment Gap:
29% of people with IED receive appropriate treatment[3]

Sources: *[1] The Prevalence and Correlates of DSM-IV Intermittent Explosive Disorder (Kessler et al., 2006). NCS-R/PMC.*
[2] Lifetime Prevalence, Correlates, and Persistence of Oppositional Defiant Disorder (Nock et al., 2007). NCS-R.
[3] The Prevalence and Correlates of DSM-IV Intermittent Explosive Disorder (Kessler et al., 2006). NCS-R/PMC

How Disruptive Disorders Contribute to Relapse

Substances offer temporary relief from the tension that builds before explosive episodes, and provide an excuse for behavior the person may already struggle to control. This creates a dangerous cycle where impulsivity drives both the addiction and the disorder.

1) **Substances Further Reduce Impulse Control**
   Alcohol and drugs reduce impulse control that's already compromised, leading to worse outcomes.
2) **Deeply Ingrained Patterns of Behavior**
   Lifelong habits of aggression take time to address.
3) **Untreated Impulsivity Undermines Recovery**
   The behavioral patterns sabotage sobriety repeatedly.

> *"Families have walked on eggshells for years, never knowing what would set off an explosion. The disorder behind the behavior doesn't excuse it, but it does explain why consequences alone have never been enough to make change happen."*
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> **Angie Buja, MA, LPC-S**
> *Family Program Director, Burning Tree Ranch*

How Disruptive Disorders Are Identified & Diagnosed

- A detailed behavioral history extending back to childhood and adolescence
- Observation over time to distinguish the disorder from substance-induced aggression
- Assessment of the pattern, frequency, and consequences of impulsive or defiant behavior

Long-Term Treatment for Disruptive Disorders and Addiction

Disruptive disorders involve deeply ingrained patterns of emotional and behavioral response that developed over many years. Changing these patterns requires consistent structure and time—far more than short-term programs can provide. Our **long-term, progress-based model** allows for genuine behavioral transformation.

1) **Accurate Diagnosis Comes First**
   Treatment must separate the disorder from symptoms of SUD.
2) **Treating Both Conditions Together**
   The impulsivity and anger continue to drive substance use.
3) **Measuring Progress by Behavior, Not Days**
   Clients must demonstrate emotional regulation and impulse control.

Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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