



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2011

I10 Implications of Antisocial Parents: The Effects and Impact of Antisocial Parents on the Developing Child

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After attending this presentation, attendees will become familiar with distinguishing characteristics of antisocial personality disorder, psychopathy, and sociopathy. Attendees will also gain a better understanding of the development of antisocial behavior from a genetic, biological, and environmental perspective. Finally, attendees will learn about the effects of parents with antisocial behavior on children and the impact that this behavior has on the development of children.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by helping to further understand the development of antisocial behavior in children who have antisocial parents as well as the transmission of antisocial behavior from parents to children.

Antisocial behavior is a socially maladaptive and harmful trait to possess in the general population. This can be especially injurious for a child who is raised by a parent with this personality structure. The pathology of antisocial behavior implies traits such as deceitfulness, irresponsibility, unreliability, and an incapability to feel guilt, remorse, or even love. This is damaging to a child's emotional, cognitive, and social development. Parents with this personality makeup can leave a child traumatized, empty, and incapable of forming meaningful personal relationships.

There is a significant stability of antisocial behavior across generations, and both genetic and environmental factors influence the development of antisocial behavior. Numerous twin studies as well as studies involving adopted children have confirmed the strong heritability of antisocial behavior.^{1,2} Moreover, the child with a genetic predisposition to antisocial behavior who is raised with a parental style that triggers the genetic liability is at high risk for developing the same personality structure. Parental negativity and warmth moderate the influence of genetic factors on the development of antisocial behavior in adolescents.³

In addition, adolescents' perceptions of parents' activities and inept parenting practices⁴ provide two nongenetic routes of transmission of antisocial behavior from parents to adolescents. The child's awareness of the parent's behavior establishes a cognitive mechanism through which behavior is transmitted. Antisocial individuals are impulsive, irritable, and often have no concerns over their purported responsibilities. As a parent, this can lead to erratic discipline, neglectful parenting, and can undermine effective care-giving. Therefore, these parents lack consistency and discipline skills and are more likely to use hostile and coercive methods.⁵ Thus, they are likely to inadvertently reinforce aggressive and antisocial behavior.

Other factors such as abuse,⁶ head injury,^{7,8} and separation^{9,10} also influence the development of antisocial behavior.

Simply having knowledge of this will not necessarily alter the behavior or attitude of antisocial parents. The parents may be likely to minimize the evidence of the effects of their antisocial behavior on their children, thus allowing the behavior to continue. Moreover, inherent in the personality makeup of these individuals, be it antisocial, psychopathic, or sociopathic, are a lack of remorse, impulsivity, and disregard for others. These traits further lessen the chance that a parent will modify his or her behavior because of the likelihood that his or her child is modeling after it.

Therefore, not only is there trauma and often abuse in these families, but also there is a transmission of antisocial behavior from parents to children. This presentation will focus on the implications of parents with antisocial behavior and the impact that this behavior has on attachment as well as on the development of antisocial traits in children. **References:**

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Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2011

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