



Concerned parent

By Dr. Douglas Berger, M.D., Ph D. | **ASK THE EXPERT**



Question 1

How do you know if you are raising a sociopathic child?

Question 2

From what age is it evident?

Question 3

Would you advise parents to tell the school that the child has been diagnosed with sociopathic behaviour?

The official psychiatric diagnostic term for sociopathy is now called antisocial personality disorder (APD), and it is characterized by breaking the law for one's profit, cheating others, and aggression. Personality disorders are generally thought to become clear in late adolescence, the diagnosis of APD requiring the person to be at least 18 years old, however, a diagnosis of conduct disorder is also necessary before the age of 15. Conduct disorder is characterized by cruelty to persons or animals, vandalism of objects, repetitive lying and breaking rules. Fire-setting is another sign that is thought to predict APD.

So, by definition, you may have a child with conduct disorder, but you have to be 18 years old to have APD, and "sociopath" is not a currently used nomenclature (although the word may someday

come back into official usage).

The reader should note that there is no absolute proof or test for a psychiatric diagnosis because they are driven by behavioral and/or subjective symptoms. Especially for personality diagnoses and diagnoses in children, it may become evident over time that the person more likely has attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity, manic episodes, drug use, borderline intelligence, or that their behavior is driven by peer pressure to fit into a group and will abate as the child grows older.

If your child seems to have Conduct Disorder, the first step would be to see a psychiatrist to evaluate the entire picture. If the child's behavior obviously fits with conduct disorder the behavior will be fairly evident to the school, but because of the unreliability of psychiatric diagnostic labels in a child as noted above, it is probably prudent to avoid using definitive diagnostic terms that may not be correct, will stick with the child's record for life, and may cause the school to make educational decisions (ie, expulsion) based on a label rather than what it is helpful for the child and how they might respond to treatment.



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The Meguro Counseling Center provides mental health care for individuals, couples and families, in both English and Japanese.

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