

Unruly kids may have a mental disorder

April 29 2012

When children behave badly, it's easy to blame their parents. Sometimes, however, such behavior may be due to a mental disorder.

Mental illnesses are the No. 1 cause of medical disability in youths ages 15 and older in the United States and Canada, according to the [World Health Organization](#).

"One reason we haven't made greater progress helping people recover from [mental disorders](#) is that we get on the scene too late," said Thomas R. Insel, MD, director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and the featured speaker at the American Academy of Pediatrics' Presidential Plenary during the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Boston.

Dr. Insel will discuss signs of [mental illnesses](#) in young children and the importance of early diagnosis and intervention in his presentation, "What Every [Pediatrician](#) Needs to Know about Mental Disorders," on Sunday, April 29, in the Hynes Convention Center.

As the first line of defense, pediatricians can detect mental disorders early and ensure children get treatment as soon as possible, Dr. Insel said. While questionnaires currently are the best way for doctors to screen for mental illness, better tools are on the horizon, such as cognitive and genetic tests.

It's also important to understand that mental illnesses are a developmental brain disorder even though they can look like [behavior](#)

[problems](#), Dr. Insel explained.

"The future of mental illness has to be at the point where we aren't treating behavior separately from the rest of the person," he said. "There needs to be full integration of behavior and medical concerns to ensure that we are able to care for the whole person and not just one system."

In addition to serving as director of the NIMH, Dr. Insel is acting director of the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences, a new arm of the National Institutes of Health that aims to accelerate the development of diagnostics and therapeutics.

Autism also is an area of interest for Dr. Insel. He chairs the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Prior to joining NIMH, he was director of the Center for Autism Research and professor of psychiatry at Emory University, where he was the founding director of the Center for Behavioral Neuroscience.

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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