



Behavior therapy best treatment right now for body-focused repetitive disorders in youth

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Body-focused repetitive behaviors such as hair pulling, skin picking, and thumb sucking, can sometimes become frequent and difficult to control, leading to a group of conditions known as body-focused repetitive behavior disorders (BFRBDs). In children, BFRBDs are common and can result in a range of physical problems (e.g., hair loss, scarring, dental malocclusions, and infections) as well as emotional, social, and academic difficulties. Fortunately, a rapidly growing body of research shows that psychosocial interventions can alleviate the symptoms and problems associated with BFRBDs in children. In a recent review, Douglas Woods and David Houghton at Texas A&M University identified behavior therapy as having the greatest level of empirical support for treating BFRBDs in children. Behavior therapy is delivered individually by a clinician to a child with a BFRBD, and is based on a theoretical approach called applied behavior analysis (ABA). In ABA, BFRBDs are addressed by increasing the child's awareness of the behavior, teaching him or her to combat the behavior using a competing behavior, and encouraging the child to use the competing behavior through praise or other positive means. Individual behavior therapy has been shown to decrease the frequency of body-focused repetitive behaviors.

Although Woods and Houghton found that individual behavior therapy had the most scientific support for children with BFRBDs, more research is needed before this intervention can be termed "well established." In fact, individual behavior therapy was identified as "probably efficacious" for thumb sucking, "possibly efficacious" for hair pulling, and "experimental" for skin picking, nail biting, and cheek biting. The authors noted that future well-designed studies were required to confirm initial recommendations, to tell clinicians how the treatments were actually leading to improvements in BFRBDs, and generally to help researchers understand how BFRBDs develop and remit in children.

Source: [Woods, D. W., & Houghton, D. W. \(In Press\). Evidence-based psychosocial treatments for pediatric body-focused repetitive behavior disorders. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*.](#)

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RESOURCES: For more information, interested readers can go to www.effectivechildtherapy.com. The website offers free videos on a variety of child/adolescent therapy topics, including videos describing various evidence-based treatment approaches; there are videos for [parents](#) and [professionals](#).

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