

THE ANGRY CHILD



All children and adolescents can be difficult, especially when they are tired, hungry, stressed or upset.

They may argue, talk back, disobey, and defy parents, teachers, and other adults. However, when this behavior consistently disrupts your child's daily life at home, at school and with peers, this could possibly be **Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)** or **Conduct Disorder**.



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For toddlers (2-3 years old) and early adolescents, showing anger is a normal part of growing up. But, when a child shows a firmly established, continuous pattern of uncooperative, defiant, and hostile behavior toward authority figures this is considered **OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER (ODD)**.

Warning signs of ODD are when a child:

- frequently loses temper
- often argues a lot with adults
- almost always actively defies or refuses to follow adult rules and requests
- often annoys and upsets people on purpose
- often causes trouble and blames others for their mistakes or misbehavior
- is touchy, easily angered, resentful and annoyed by others
- is often spiteful or seeks revenge, wants to "get even"

A child exhibiting four or more of these behaviors for 6 months or more could possibly have ODD. Only a mental health professional can make a diagnosis.



My child is very aggressive and tends to bother and irritate others regularly. At school, my child misbehaves, fights, and argues with students, teachers, and other adults. As a result, my child is sent to detention or to the principal's office almost everyday. Is this a phase or possibly an aggressive or oppositional disorder?

When a child or adolescent firmly establishes a pattern of repeatedly violating the personal or property rights of others and aggressively acting toward people and/or animals, destroys property, steals or lies, and breaks important rules at home or school and behaving in other socially unacceptable ways, this is considered **CONDUCT DISORDER**.

Warning signs of Conduct Disorder are when a child:

- often bullies, threatens or scares others
- often starts physical fights
- uses a weapon (bat, brick, broken bottle, knife or gun) that could cause serious physical harm to others
- is physically cruel to people or animals
- steals from victims while confronting them
- forces someone into sexual activity
- purposely destroys and damages other people's property, or starts fires to cause damage
- breaks into someone else's building, house or car
- lies to get items wanted or to avoid responsibility, "cons" and manipulates others
- steals items without breaking and entering
- runs away from home more than once, or runs away once and stays away for a long time
- often leaves home or stays out at night without parents permission*
- often skips school*

* These behaviors (breaking important rules at home or school, breaking curfew, skipping school) are more common and developmentally associated with teenagers over the age of 13 and are greater at-risk warnings for those under age 13.

A child that has three or more of these behaviors for at least 12 months or one of these behaviors for at least 6 months, could possibly have **Conduct Disorder**. If you are concerned because you see these signs in your child's behavior, a mental health professional can give your child an evaluation.

Children with **ODD** and **Conduct Disorder** are at greater risk of having other problems related to their mental health or social and emotional well being, such as having trouble paying attention and sitting still, being depressed or being anxious.

TREATMENT

Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder are treatable. It is unclear what causes aggressive/oppositional disorders, but research shows that they may be caused by genetic and environmental factors. This data also shows the following methods are the most effective treatment options for ODD and Conduct Disorder. Your child's doctor can provide more information or a referral to a mental health professional in your community.

Behavior Management Training teaches parents effective ways to promote self discipline and positive behaviors in their child. It also offers parents ways to deal with and respond to their child's difficult and disruptive behaviors.

Social Skills Training teaches the child skills to help them better interact with other people

Case Management helps the family coordinate all aspects of the child's care, helps find resources and manage crisis, and monitors the child's progress.

Parent Education programs and activities help parents to better understand ODD and Conduct Disorder and how to best access resources within the community.

Medication helps the child to manage hostile or aggressive behavior

Research shows that **Multisystemic Therapy (MST)** is effective in some instances. MST is an intensive, family-based treatment that uses family strengths to encourage positive social behavior and decrease serious antisocial behaviors of a child in their home, school, and public environments.

Studies also show that children with these disorders often benefit from combined treatment methods that includes the child and the family.

GETTING HELP

If you observe the signs of ODD or Conduct Disorder in your child or adolescent, talk to a mental health professional, doctor, school nurse or school counselor to help you and your child understand and get treatment for this common, treatable mental health disorder. Call or visit online the resources listed below to learn more about ODD, Conduct Disorder and other children's mental health issues.

RESOURCES

Mental Health America of Texas
www.mhatexas.org

Mental Health America
www.MentalHealthAmerica.net
1-800-969-NMHA

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)
www.aacap.org
1-800-333-7636

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov

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