

CONDUCT DISORDER

Children and adolescents with conduct disorders have great difficulty following rules, respecting the rights of others, showing empathy, and behaving in a socially acceptable way. They are often viewed by other children, adults, and social agencies as "bad" or delinquent, rather than mentally ill. Many factors may lead to a child developing conduct disorder, including brain damage, child abuse or neglect, genetic vulnerability, school failure, and traumatic life experiences.

Symptoms

- **Aggression to people and animals**
 - bullies, threatens, or intimidates others
 - delights in being cruel and mean to others
 - starts physical fights
 - has used a weapon that could cause serious physical harm to others (e.g. a bat, brick, broken bottle, knife, or gun)
 - is physically cruel to people or animals
 - steals from a victim while hurting them
 - forces someone into sexual activity
 - shows no genuine remorse after an aggressive episode
- **Destruction of property**
 - deliberately engaged in fire setting with the intention to cause damage
 - deliberately destroys other's property
- **Deceitfulness, lying, or stealing**
 - has broken into someone's building, house, or car
 - lies to obtain goods or favors, or to avoid obligations
 - steals items without confronting a victim (e.g. shoplifting, but without breaking and entering)
- **Serious violations of rules**
 - often stays out at night despite parental objections
 - runs away from home
 - often stays away from home

Diagnosis

- Comprehensive evaluation by an experienced mental health professional.

Treatment

- Developing a comprehensive treatment plan, a child and adolescent psychiatrist may use information from the child, family, teachers, community (including the legal system), and other medical specialties to understand the causes of the disorder.
- Behavior therapy and psychotherapy are usually necessary to help the child appropriately express and control anger.
- Special education may be needed for youngsters with learning disabilities.
- Parents often need expert help to develop and carry out special management and educational programs in the home and at school.
- Home-based treatment programs such as Multisystemic Therapy (MST) are effective for helping both the child and family.
- Treatment may also include medication in some youngsters who may have difficulty paying attention, impulse problems, or depression.
- Treatment is rarely brief since establishing new attitudes and behavior patterns takes time. However, early treatment offers a child a better chance for considerable improvement and hope for a more successful future.



Adapted from:

https://www.aacap.org/aacap/families_and_youth/facts_for_families/fff-guide/conduct-disorder-033.aspx