



Conduct Disorder: Facts for Families

What is conduct disorder?

Conduct disorder is a disruptive behavior disorder. Children and youth with conduct disorder have aggressive and destructive behavior. They show a lack of respect for authority and often have behavioral problems such as stealing, lying, harming animals or destroying property.

There are two subsets of conduct disorder:

- Childhood-onset – includes youth who show these behaviors before age 10
- Adolescent-onset – includes youth who show these behaviors after age 10 but did not meet the conduct disorder criteria before the age of 10

Conduct disorder may be described as mild, moderate or severe. This depends on the number of problem behaviors your child shows and their impact on other people. Conduct behaviors can disrupt your child's environments such as home, school, church or the neighborhood.

What are the symptoms of conduct disorder?

If your child has a conduct disorder, they may show these signs and symptoms:

- May be considered a “bully” at school or at home
- Intimidate, threaten others or start fights
- Are physically cruel to people or animals
- Engage in criminal-type behavior like vandalism

The signs and symptoms of conduct disorder in children and teens fall into 1 of 4 categories:

- Physical Aggression
- Property Destruction
- Deceitfulness (lying) or Theft
- Serious Rule Violations

How common is conduct disorder?

Conduct disorder is a problem faced by about 1 to 3 out of 100 children and teens.

What causes conduct disorder?

It is not known exactly what causes conduct disorder. However, there is a strong relationship between conduct disorder, family conflict, and harsh and punitive parenting practices. Studies show that conduct disorder may continue when there are poor parenting practices and coercive (intimidating) family interactions.

To Learn More

- Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine: Support and Crisis Services 206-987-2164, option 4
- Your child's healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

What is the impact of conduct disorder?

Often conduct disorder behaviors result in referrals for mental health care, classroom detentions or other more punitive consequences (due to behaviors such as theft or property destruction in the community). Conduct disorder behaviors can be very hard for parents to manage. Children and youth with conduct disorder have a higher chance of:

- Illegal drug use
- School drop out
- Violent behavior
- Severe family conflict
- Breaking the law
- Being placed in the juvenile justice system and out-of-home placements

The costs of conduct disorder to society are great.

How is conduct disorder treated?

There are 3 main types of treatment for youth with conduct disorder:

- Parent Management Training (sometimes called Behavioral Parent Training) – this includes teaching you how to learn discipline strategies that will help you manage your child's disruptive behaviors.
- Behavior Therapy - this includes setting behavioral goals for your child or teen. Your child will earn and lose privileges based on their meeting, or not meeting, these goals.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy – this includes teaching your child strategies to manage their anger and aggression using positive responses.

Is treatment helpful?

Parent management training is the only “well-established” (or evidence-based) treatment for conduct disorder. It has been shown to lower noncompliance, rule breaking, and aggression in the short term and long term. In order for the improvements to continue you will need to take part in these treatments on an ongoing basis.