Oppositional Defiant Disorder: Facts for Families

What are the symptoms of Oppositional Defiant Disorder?

It is common for children to be defiant toward adults sometimes. For example, they may argue, refuse to do what they are told, or talk back. However, if your child has negative, hostile and defiant behavior that lasts more than 6 months and is worse than behavior normally seen in children of the same age, your child may have Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). ODD is a behavior disorder. The signs and symptoms include frequent:

- Loss of temper
- Arguing with adults
- Refusing to do what adults ask or to follow rules
- Annoying other people on purpose
- Blaming others for their own mistakes
- Being touchy or easily annoyed by others
- Anger and resentment
- Spitefulness or vindictiveness (being unkind or mean)

How common is ODD?

ODD is a fairly common problem in children and teens. At any point in time, about 1 to 16 out of 100 children and teens are struggling with this behavior problem. Boys are much more likely to have ODD than girls. ODD and other behavior problems are the most common reason children are referred to mental health care.

What causes ODD?

It is not known exactly what causes ODD. It may develop from a combination of biological, psychological, and environmental factors, including:

- The disposition or temperament your child was born with
- An imbalance of chemicals in the brain
- Difficulty processing thoughts and feelings
- Inconsistent or harsh discipline
- Abuse, neglect or exposure to violence
What is the impact of ODD?

ODD can cause social, academic and family problems. It is likely that your child’s ODD will improve over time, but it does put them at a greater risk for more serious disorders, such as Conduct Disorder. Due to the long-term consequences of ODD, it should be taken seriously and treated.

How is ODD treated?

There are two types of treatments for children with ODD:

- Individual approach – this includes teaching your child problem-solving skills so they can learn positive ways to respond to stressful situations
- Family interventions – this includes training you how to use discipline strategies that work

Because ODD often occurs along with other disorders such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity disorder, learning problems, conduct disorders, and anxiety and mood disorders, it is important to have a comprehensive evaluation and treatment plan for your child. Medicine may help treat related disorders, such as attention or mood disorders. It is helpful to work with your child’s school to address their learning difficulties and peer problems.

Is treatment helpful?

About 2 out of 3 children who are treated for ODD will show major improvements. Learning how to use effective discipline strategies has been shown to greatly reduce behavior problems in children. There is also some evidence that having your child use problem-solving skills can reduce behavior problems. Medicines may be helpful for treating your child’s ODD symptoms if they also have Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.