Disruptive Behavior Disorders

People with disruptive behavior disorders show patterns of acting out, being hostile, or challenging authority. This may include temper tantrums, fighting, cruelty, arguing, and defying authority. Starting first in childhood, this pattern leads to problems at school and in relationships with family or friends. If not treated, it may continue into adulthood. The two most common disorders are oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder.

Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD)

If a child acts out to the point of causing serious problems at home, in school, or with peers, he or she may be diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). ODD gets in the way of daily life and often starts before 8 years of age, but not later than 12 years old.

Signs may include:
- Being angry or losing one’s temper often
- Arguing with adults or refusing to follow rules or requests
- Being resentful or spiteful
- Annoying others on purpose or becoming annoyed with others
- Blaming other people for one’s own mistakes or misbehavior

Conduct disorder (CD)

If a child shows an ongoing pattern of aggression toward others and violates rules at home, school, and with peers, then he or she may have conduct disorder. His or her behavior may involve breaking the law and arrests.

Children with CD are more likely to get injured and may have problems getting along with peers.

Signs may include:
- Being aggressive, such as bullying, fighting, or being cruel to animals
- Destroying property on purpose
- Lying or stealing
- Serious violation of rules, such as running away or skipping school
### Who is at risk

It is not known why some children develop disruptive behavior disorders. Some things are known to be risk factors.

Children are more at risk to have a disruptive behavior disorder if they:

- Are exposed to other types of violence and criminal behavior
- Have been abused or had harsh parenting
- Have parents with mental health problems, such as substance use or depression
- Had poor childcare in early childhood

### Treatment

Starting treatment early is important. The first step is to talk with a health care provider. An evaluation by a mental health professional may be needed to get the right diagnosis.

There are different treatments that may be used, such as intervention programs and medicines. Treatment is based on a person’s needs and signs. It also considers:

- Person’s age and development
- How bad the symptoms are
- If the person has other health problems
- How able the person is to take part in treatment

#### Intervention Programs

- **Parent training programs** teach family members skills to manage the child’s behavior.
- **Family therapy programs** involve working with both the family and the child.
- **Skills-based programs** teach the child new skills for dealing with situations and emotions.

#### Medicine

- Medicine can be used to treat other disorders that play a role in causing disruptive behavior, such as medicine for ADHD, mood disorders, or anxiety disorders.

If you, your child, or someone you care for shows signs of a disruptive behavior disorder, begin by talking to your child’s doctor, your family doctor, or a counselor.

### For more information

Learn more at the National Institute of Mental Health by visiting [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov).

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

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**Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).

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