



Conduct Disorder

What is Conduct Disorder?

Conduct disorder is a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in children and adolescents in which the rights of others or basic social rules are violated. The child or adolescent usually exhibits these behavior patterns in a variety of settings—at home, at school, and in social situations—and they cause significant impairment in his or her social, academic, and family functioning.

Conduct disorder is more common among boys than girls. Conduct disorder can have its onset early, before age 10, or in adolescence. Children who display early-onset conduct disorder are at greater risk for persistent difficulties, however, and they are also more likely to have troubled peer relationships and academic problems. Among both boys and girls, conduct disorder is one of the disorders most frequently diagnosed in mental health settings.



What are the Signs and Symptoms?

Behaviors characteristic of conduct disorder include:

- Aggressive behavior that causes or threatens harm to other people or animals, such as bullying or intimidating others, often initiating physical fights, or being physically cruel to animals.
- Non-aggressive conduct that causes property loss or damage, such as fire-setting or the deliberate destruction of others' property.
- Deceitfulness or theft, such as breaking into someone's house or car, or lying or "conning" others.
- Serious rule violations, such as staying out at night when prohibited, running away from home overnight, or often being truant from school.

Many youth with conduct disorder may have trouble feeling and expressing empathy or remorse and reading social cues. These youth often misinterpret the actions of others as being hostile or aggressive and respond by escalating the situation into conflict.



What Can Parents and Caregivers Do?

Assessment and diagnosis should be done by a mental health professional and made in consultation with the child's family. The assessment process should include observation of the child, discussion with the child and family, the use of standardized instruments or structured diagnostic interviews, and history-taking, including a complete medical and family / social history. When assessing and diagnosing, the mental health professional should consider the social and economic context in which a child's behavior occurs. Accurate assessment and appropriate, individualized treatment will assure that all children are equipped to navigate the developmental milestones of childhood and adolescence and make a successful adaptation to adulthood. Treatment must be provided in the least restrictive setting possible.

