



Conduct Disorders

Children with conduct disorder may have trouble reading social cues and feeling and expressing empathy or remorse. Conduct disorder may also be associated with other difficulties such as substance use, risk-taking behavior, school problems, and physical injury from accidents or fights.

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. These youth often misinterpret the actions of others as being hostile or aggressive and respond by escalating the situation into conflict.

Signs and symptoms

Behaviors of conduct disorder may 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.

How common is conduct disorder?

Conduct disorder is more common among boys than girls, with studies indicating that the rate among boys in the general population ranges from 6 percent to 16 percent while the rate among girls ranges from 2 percent to 9 percent.¹

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.

Conduct disorder tends to co-occur with a number of other emotional and behavioral disorders of childhood

Research

Research has shown that most children and adolescents with conduct disorder do not grow up to have behavioral problems. Conduct disorder has both genetic and environmental components and is more common among the children of adults who may have exhibited conduct problems when they were younger.

1. Mental Health America, Conduct Disorder, www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/conduct-disorder

Conduct disorder tends to co-occur with a number of other emotional and behavioral disorders of childhood, particularly Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Mood Disorders (such as depression and anxiety).

The importance of assessments

Assessment and diagnosis of conduct disorder—or any emotional or behavioral disorder of childhood—should be conducted by a mental health professional, preferably one who is trained in children’s mental health. Any diagnosis must be made in consultation with the child’s family. When assessing and diagnosing any childhood emotional or behavioral disorder, the mental health professional should consider the social and economic context in which a child’s behavior occurs.

What can I do if I’m concerned about a child?

- Learn more about conduct disorder, including recent research on effective treatment approaches.
- Consult with a mental health professional, preferably one who is trained in children’s mental health.
- Explore the treatment options available. Treatment must be individualized to meet the needs of each child and should be family-centered and developmentally and culturally appropriate.
- Find a family support group or organization in your community.

Contact us

Your program provides access to tools and other resources online or call us directly to speak to a professional counselor who is available everyday

and at any time to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.

Resources

The National Alliance for Caregiving

www.caregiving.org

HelpGuide

www.helpguide.org/topics/caregiving.htm

This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Health does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here