

Behaviour or Conduct Problems in Children



Children sometimes argue, are aggressive, or act angry or defiant around adults. A behaviour disorder may be diagnosed when these disruptive behaviours are uncommon for the child's age at the time, persist over time, or are severe. Because disruptive behaviour disorders involve acting out and showing unwanted behaviour towards others they are often called **externalising disorders**.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder

When children act out persistently so that it causes serious problems at home, in school, or with peers, they may be diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). ODD usually starts before 8 years of age, but no later than by about 12 years of age. Children with ODD are more likely to act oppositional or defiant around people they know well, such as family members, a regular care provider, or a teacher. Children with ODD show these behaviours more often than other children their age.

Examples of ODD behaviours include

- Often being angry or losing one's temper
- Often arguing with adults or refusing to comply with adults' rules or requests
- Often resentful or spiteful
- Deliberately annoying others or becoming annoyed with others
- Often blaming other people for one's own mistakes or misbehaviour

Conduct Disorder

Conduct Disorder (CD) is diagnosed when children show an ongoing pattern of aggression toward others, and serious violations of rules and social norms at home, in school, and with peers. These rule violations may involve breaking the law and result in arrest. Children with CD are more likely to get injured and may have difficulties getting along with peers.



Examples of CD behaviours include

- Breaking serious rules such as running away, staying out at night when told not to, or skipping school
- Being aggressive in a way that causes harm, such as bullying, fighting, or being cruel to animals
- Lying, stealing, or damaging other people's property on purpose

Treatment for disruptive behaviour disorders

Starting treatment early is important. Treatment is most effective if it fits the needs of the specific child and family. The first step to treatment is to talk with a healthcare provider. A comprehensive evaluation by a mental health professional may be needed to get the right diagnosis. Some of the signs of behaviour problems, such as not following rules in school, could be related to learning problems which may need additional intervention. For younger children, the treatment with the strongest evidence is behaviour therapy training for parents, where a therapist helps the parent learn effective ways to strengthen the parent-child relationship and respond to the child's behaviour. For school-age children and teens, an often-used effective treatment is a combination of training and therapy that includes the child, the family, and the school.

Reference:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov

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