

# CONDUCT DISORDER FACT SHEET

## Background

Conduct Disorder refers to a group of behavioral and emotional problems in children. Children and adolescents with this disorder have great difficulty following rules and behaving in a socially acceptable way. They are often viewed by other children, adults, and social service agencies as “bad” or delinquent, rather than mentally ill. Many factors may contribute to a child developing conduct disorder, including brain damage, child abuse, genetic vulnerability, school failure, and traumatic life experiences.

## Treatment

Treatment of children with conduct disorder can be complex and challenging. Treatment can be provided in a variety of different settings depending on the severity of the behaviors. Behavior therapy and psychotherapy are usually necessary to help the child appropriately express and control anger. Special education may be needed for kids with learning disabilities. Parents often need expert assistance in devising and carrying out special management and educational programs in the home and school. Treatment may also include medication in some children, such as those with difficulty paying attention, impulse problems, or depression. Treatment is rarely brief since establishing new behavior patterns and attitudes takes time. Early treatment offers a child a better change for considerable improvement and hope for a more successful future.

Children who exhibit these behaviors should receive a comprehensive evaluation. Many children with a conduct disorder may have coexisting conditions such as mood disorders, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse, ADHD learning problems, or thought disorders which can also be treated. Research shows that children with conduct disorder are likely to have ongoing problems if they and their families do not receive early and comprehensive treatment. The earlier the condition is diagnosed, the more successful the therapy will be. While a child learns a better way to interact with the world at large, the family learns the best ways to communicate with them.

## Behaviors can include:

- Aggression to people or animals
  - Bullies, threatens others
  - Initiates physical fights
  - Has used a weapon that could harm others
  - Steals from a victim
  - Forces someone into sexual activity
- Destruction of property
  - Deliberately engages in fire setting with intention to damage
  - Deliberately destroys other’s property
- Deceitfulness, lying, or stealing
  - Has broken into someone else’s property
  - Lies to obtain favors or goods
  - Steals items
- Serious violation of rules
  - Often stays out at night despite parental objections
  - Runs away from home
  - Often truant from school