

What are Behavioral / Conduct Problems?

All children break rules, get angry, or act out sometimes. But when these behaviors are very intense, happen often, or are not appropriate for a child's age, they might be signs of a behavior or conduct disorder.

Younger children might have extreme temper tantrums, and be physically aggressive toward others on purpose. Teenagers might bully others, hurt animals, steal, or damage property.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

How common are behavioral/conduct problems?

About 3% of children and teens are diagnosed with a conduct disorder.

How can I find out if my child has a behavioral or conduct problem?

If you're worried, talk to a medical provider and your child's school. A medical provider may give you and your child's teacher a questionnaire about behavior. They can also refer you to a mental health specialist for help or more testing.

What kind of services are available for children with behavior/conduct problems?

There are many different services available to treat behavior and conduct problems. Getting help early and involving family can make a big difference. Common treatments include:

- **Parent management training:** Teaches skills and strategies that caregivers can use to help reduce a child's disruptive behaviors and increase more positive behaviors.
- **Multisystemic therapy:** Intensive therapy that works with the family, school, and community to support the child.
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** Helps children learn to change negative thoughts and actions.
- **Medication:** May help some children.

What other conditions are sometimes found with behavior and conduct problems?

Sometimes, children with behavioral issues also experience developmental delays, or have ADHD, anxiety, or mood disorders.

Talking with a Medical Provider

When you talk to medical providers, you might want to discuss and share:

- Any concerns that you or others have about a child's behavior. Ask if the behavior is appropriate for the child's age.
- Observations or videos of behaviors that worry you.
- Recommended treatment or a possible referral to a mental health specialist.

What You Can Do at Home

Finding the right health care provider and treatment plan can take time. But there are things you can do now that can make a big difference:

- **Set clear rules:** Make sure your child understands what is expected. Try to focus on what they *should* be doing instead of what *not* to do.
- **Be consistent with consequences:** Children need clear boundaries, with fair and steady consequences when they push past a boundary.
- **Use positive reinforcement:** Praise and reward positive behaviors and growth.
- **Take care of yourself:** Challenging behavior is stressful. Pause and take a moment to check in with yourself before responding.

Remember, getting help for your child and learning about behavior and conduct problems is a journey. You're not alone.

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ACT for Youth: Behavioral Problems



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About This Series

This series of handouts on health conditions was written by clinicians in Weill Cornell Medicine's Pediatric Mental Health Integration Program, partners in the ACT for Youth CYSHCN Program Center of Excellence at Cornell University.

