

Facts

People with conduct disorder display a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated. The disorder may begin as early as age 5, but rarely begins after age 16. Conduct disorder may develop into Antisocial Personality Disorder and is associated with increased risk of mood, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders in adulthood.

The incidence of conduct disorder appears to have increased over the past several decades and may be higher in urban than in rural settings. The disorder is more common in males than in females, affecting about 6 to 16% of males and 2 to 9% of females in the U.S.

Signs & Symptoms

- Aggression to people and animals
- Destruction of property
- Deceitfulness or theft
- Serious violation of rules

Causes

Twin and adoption studies indicate that conduct disorder has both genetic and environmental factors. The risk for conduct disorder is increased in children who have a biological or adoptive parent with Antisocial Personality Disorder, or a sibling with Conduct Disorder. It is also more common if a parent has alcohol dependence, mood disorders, schizophrenia, or a history of Conduct Disorder or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. A chaotic home life, parenting problems, alcoholism, or drug abuse in the home; socioeconomic deprivation which encourages stealing to get what is wanted; and developmental factors leading to high anger and low frustration tolerance are all environmental factors related to conduct disorder.

Treatment

Some treatment options include: individual and family therapy, medication to manage assaultive behavior, residential placement, cognitive-behavioral

therapy to control anger and develop social skills, special schooling, vocational counseling, and tutoring for academic deficiencies.

Helping Yourself

Finding ways to relax which work for you can be a key strategy in helping yourself. Here are a few things you can try:

- **Monitor your outlook.** Remember that the specific thing that triggers your anger isn't the only thing which causes angry feelings. When you get angry, ask yourself: Am I overreacting to this trigger? Am I directing my anger at an innocent person? Am I taking this personally? Am I just reacting the way I usually respond? Am I trying to take charge of my anger?
- **Breathing.** Consciously take several deep breaths, concentrating on each breath.
- **Relaxation** by body parts. Close your eyes, take several deep breaths, and consciously relax yourself, one body part at a time, beginning at your toes and working up until you have relaxed your entire body, including head and face. An alternative is to tense each body part for 15-20 seconds before relaxing it.
- **Imagine** a pleasant peaceful scene or favorite place. Concentrate on the details, colors, smells and sounds.
- **Massage.** Self-massage of face, neck and head is easy to do and is an instant stress reducer.
- Find a way to **express your feelings.** It may be to join a support group, start a diary or journal, or talk things over with a friend.
- **Exercise** is known to increase the body's morphine-like endorphins, while improving the brain's oxygen supply and releasing tension from the muscles.
- **Have a sense of humor.** Try to find the humor in minor troubles and annoyances.
- **Meditation**, yoga, listening to soothing music all are proven stress-reducing activities, as well as hot baths, warm showers, steam baths and saunas.

Serving people in Crawford, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Missaukee, Roscommon and Wexford Counties.

- **Try a hobby.** A hobby can be a productive outlet for tension and energy and a welcome distraction from angry feelings.

Helping Someone Else

Family therapy can be helpful in increasing education and understanding among family members of a person with this disorder. Parents may also want to seek treatment focusing on behavioral management, communication, problem-solving, realistic expectations, etc. In addition, many parents have benefited from participating in a community support group.

If you are the parent or caregiver of a person with conduct disorder, it is important to take care of yourself and stay connected with your own support system, i.e., maintain and increase your network of friends, keep in regular contact with several trusted people, participate in new activities.

In dealing with the day-to-day behaviors of the person, don't answer anger with anger. It's important to try to understand why the person is angry by listening, maintaining eye contact, and not interrupting. Sometimes the person just needs to "vent," and the anger doesn't involve you personally. If you're trying to solve a conflict, wait until the person is calm and try talking through possible solutions together that you can both agree on. If a person is very angry and has a weapon, don't confront or try to restrain them. If you're worried about your safety, get away and get help.

- Always build on the positive, give the child praise and positive reinforcement when he shows flexibility or cooperation.
- Take a time-out or break if you are about to make the conflict with your child worse. This is good modeling for your child. Support your child if he decides to take a time-out to prevent overreacting.
- Pick your battles. Prioritize the things you want your child to do. If you give your child a time-out in his room for misbehavior, don't add time for arguing. Say "your time will start when you go to your room."
- Set up reasonable, age appropriate limits with consequences that can be enforced consistently.

For more information contact

Northern Lakes Community Mental Health
1-800-492-5742
(231) 922-4850

National Alliance on Mental Illness
www.nami.org
(800) 950-6264

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov
(800) 421-4211 (depression info)
(888) 826-9438 (anxiety info)
(301) 443-4513 (other info)

Mental Health America
www.nmha.org
(800) 969-6642

The Center for Mental Health Services
www.mentalhealth.org/cmhs/

Sources:

Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition
National Institute of Mental Health
American Psychiatric Association
National Alliance on Mental Illness
American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry