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ADHD and Disruptive Behavior Disorders

About the series: These five information sheets provide an overview of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and some of the more common conditions that coexist with ADHD. Extended versions of each may be found at www.help4adhd.org.

WHAT ARE DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR DISORDERS?

Children with disruptive behavior disorders often show frequent defiance of authority figures, angry outbursts, and other so-called antisocial behaviors such as lying and stealing. There are two types of disruptive behavior disorders: Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and Conduct Disorder (CD). The difference between ODD and CD is in the severity of symptoms, with Conduct Disorder being the more serious of the two. A child can progress from having ODD to CD as he or she gets older.

Symptoms of Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD): A child with this disorder is often and repeatedly negative, defiant, disobedient and hostile to grown-ups and others in authority for at least six months and also frequently displays at least four of the following behaviors: getting angry, arguing with adults, disobeying orders or breaking rules, deliberately annoying others, blaming others for his or her mistakes, being touchy or easily annoyed, resentful, and spiteful or vindictive.

Approximately one-third to one-half of all children with ADHD may have ODD. Males have a greater incidence of ADHD and ODD, as do children of divorced parents and of mothers of low socioeconomic status.

Symptoms of Conduct Disorder (CD): Symptoms of CD include aggression toward people or animals, the destruction of property, lying, stealing, running away from home and skipping school. These children frequently show disregard for the welfare of others. The behaviors in CD are often described as delinquency.

CD may occur in 25 percent of children and 45 percent of adolescents with ADHD. CD is more commonly seen in boys than in girls.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNTREATED ODD/CD?

Having ODD or CD along with ADHD can make treatment for ADHD more difficult and less successful. Untreated, these children are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, get into trouble with the law, drop out of school, have lower job satisfaction and do less well as adults. Early diagnosis and treatment of these conditions is by far the best defense against these problems.

HOW DO I FIND OUT IF MY CHILD HAS ODD OR CD?

Because these conditions frequently co-occur with ADHD, the doctor or other mental health clinician who is evaluating your child will determine whether your child's symptoms are the result of ADHD, one of the disruptive behavior disorders, or both.

HOW ARE DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR DISORDERS TREATED?

Therapy:

- **Parent Training:** These are short-term interventions that teach parents specialized strategies including positive attending, ignoring, the effective use of rewards and punishments, token economies, and time out to address behavior problems.
- **Multisystemic Therapy:** This is an intensive family- and community-based treatment that addresses the multiple causes of serious antisocial behavior in youth. It may be required for severe cases of Conduct Disorder. These interventions are delivered in a variety of settings (i.e., home, school, peer groups) as needed.
- **Parent-child interaction therapy:** This treatment teaches parents to strengthen the relationship with their child and to learn

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behavior management techniques.

- **Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS):** CPS teaches difficult children and adolescents how to handle frustration and learn to be more flexible and adaptable. Parents and children learn to brainstorm for possible solutions, negotiate, make decisions, and implement solutions that are acceptable to both.
- **Family Therapy:** Often a child’s behavior can have an effect on the whole family. Family therapy is critical to helping a family cope with the realities of having a child with ADHD and disruptive behaviors.

School-wide Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS):

Many school systems now have programs in place to provide school-wide positive behavioral supports. These programs consist of: (1) clear,

consistent consequences for inappropriate behaviors; (2) positive consequences for appropriate behaviors; and (3) team-based services for those students with more extreme behavioral needs.

Medications: Medications used for the treatment of ADHD remain an important part of the treatment of ADHD with ODD/CD. According to research, children with these disorders treated with medications were not only more attentive, but less disruptive and aggressive.

WHAT CAN I DO AS A PARENT?

These children are difficult to live with and parents should not have to face these challenges alone. There are several things you can do:

- Make sure that your child gets fully evaluated so that both disorders can be treated.
- Ask a mental health professional to suggest effective parenting strategies.
- Provide structure at home and encourage appropriate behavior.
- Contact your child’s school counselor or school psychologist to discuss possible interventions to improve behaviors at school.

For more information on ADHD and Disruptive Behavior Disorders, please see *What We Know #5B: ADHD and Disruptive Behavior Disorders* on our website at: www.help4adhd.org/en/treatment/coexisting/WWK5B.

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For further information about ADHD or CHADD, please contact:

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