

All children are oppositional from time to time, especially if they are tired, hungry, upset or stressed. They may argue and talk back to teachers, parents, and other adults. Oppositional behavior is a normal part of development for toddlers and early adolescents. However, oppositional behavior becomes a serious concern when it is so frequent that it stands out when compared with other children of the same age and development level and when it affects the child's social, family and academic life.

Children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) show a pattern of negative, hostile and defiant behavior that lasts at least six months and impairs their ability to interact with caregivers, teachers and classmates. During this time period, the child or adolescent may often lose their temper, actively defy adults and appear spiteful. Other symptoms may include frequent temper tantrums, blaming others for their misbehavior and being easily annoyed by others.

How it affects my child

One to sixteen percent of all school-age children and adolescents have ODD. The causes of ODD are unknown, but many parents report that their child with ODD was more rigid and demanding than the child's siblings from an early age. When compared to their peers, children with ODD are more likely to have difficulties with academic performance and may engage in risky behaviors, including delinquent activities and substance use, although this is more common in oppositional children who are aggressive. Without intervention, children with ODD are more likely to develop other more serious problems such as destruction of property, aggression towards people and animals, lying or stealing.

What can we do about it?

Take your child or adolescent for an evaluation if ODD is suspected. There are several types of professionals who can diagnose ODD, including clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, nurse practitioners, psychiatrists and pediatricians. It is important to look for other disorders which may be present, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, mood disorders (depression, bipolar disorder) and anxiety disorders. It may be difficult to improve symptoms of ODD without treating the coexisting disorder.

Specific strategies to use at home include:

- Setting up a daily school-home note system with your child's teacher(s)
- Being consistent
- Having set rules and consequences
- Using praise and rewards frequently
- Setting up a reward system at home
- Supervising your child and getting to know his/her friends
- Identifying a homework buddy or tutor to help with homework
- Identifying a mental health professional who can help you to set up a behavioral management program
- Asking your therapist to improve social relationships by:
 - Working on group social skills
 - Teaching social problem-solving
 - Teaching other behavioral skills often considered important by children such as sports skills and board game rules
 - Decreasing undesirable and antisocial behaviors
 - Helping your child develop a close friendship

Resource Links

Children's Mental Health Matters!

Facts for Families — First Steps in Seeking Help
www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

This site contains resources for families to promote understanding of mental illnesses.
www.aacap.org

Oppositional Defiant Disorder

https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-With-Oppositional-Defiant-Disorder-072.aspx

Conduct Disorder

https://www.aacap.org/aacap/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Conduct-Disorder-033.aspx

Violent Behavior

https://www.aacap.org/aacap/families_and_youth/facts_for_families/FFF-Guide/Understanding-Violent-Behavior-In-Children-and-Adolescents-055.aspx

Mental Health America

Fact Sheet on Conduct Disorder
<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/conduct-disorder>

Mayo Clinic

This site discusses everything from the definition of ODD to lifestyle and home remedies to help change behaviors associated with the disorder.
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/oppositional-defiant-disorder/DS00630>

National Institute of Mental Health

NIMH strives to transform the understanding and treatment of mental illnesses through basic and clinical research, paving the way for prevention, recovery, and cure. Visit NIMH for information on clinical trial and mental health information, statistics and resources.
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>



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The Children's Mental Health Matters Campaign, an initiative of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD), receives funding from the Maryland Department of Health – Behavioral Health Administration, the Maryland Family Network, and community sponsors. Together with the Maryland Coalition of Families, National Center for School Mental Health, MANSEF, and hundreds of community champions, we work to raise public awareness and acceptance of the importance of children's mental health to overall child and family wellbeing. We are grateful to the National Center for School Mental Health for their collaboration in creating these resources for families.