



## **Mental Health America of Franklin County**

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# **Children's Mental Health: Conduct Disorder**

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## **What are Conduct Disorders?**

Conduct disorders are a complicated group of behavioral and emotional problems in young people. Children and adolescents with these disorders have great difficulty following rules and behaving in a socially acceptable manner. They are often viewed as "bad" or delinquent, rather than mentally ill.

## **Warning Signs of Conduct Disorders**

Children may:

- Lie.
- Steal.
- Destroy property.
- Misbehave sexually.
- Express their anger inappropriately.
- Often break rules or laws.
- Show physical and verbal aggressive behavior with other children and/or to adults.

## **Possible Causes of Conduct Disorders**

Many factors may lead to a child developing conduct disorders, including brain damage, child abuse, defects in mental and/or emotional age-development, school failure, and negative family and/or school experiences. The child's "bad" behavior causes a negative reaction from others, which causes the child to behave even worse.

## **Importance of Early Detection and Treatment**

According to research, the future of children with conduct disorders tends to be very unsettled if they and their families do not receive early, ongoing and comprehensive treatment. Without treatment, these young people often are unable to adapt to the demands of adulthood and continue to have problems with relationships and employment. They generally break laws or behave antisocially.

## **Treatment**

Treatment is difficult because the causes of the illness are complex and each situation is unique. Also, the child's uncooperative attitude, fear, and distrust of adults add to the challenge.

After examining the child, a child and adolescent psychiatrist uses information from other medical specialists, as well as from the child's family and teachers to understand the causes of the disorder and to determine a treatment plan.

Behavior therapy and psychotherapy are usually necessary to help the child appropriately express and control anger. Remedial education may also be needed if learning disabilities are present. Treatment may also include medication in some children, such as, those with difficulty paying attention and controlling movement or those who have an associated depression.

Treatment is normally long-term since establishing new attitudes and behavior patterns take time. Parents also may need expert assistance in handling special management and educational programs both at home and in school. However, treatment gives a good chance for considerable improvement in present behavior and hope for a successful future.

**Mental Health America of Franklin County** is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at [www.mhafc.org](http://www.mhafc.org).