

extremely important to seek help for any child who engages in these behaviors.

### **WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR CONDUCT DISORDER?**

It is difficult to treat children and adolescents with conduct disorder. It may be difficult to obtain the trust and cooperation of the child and his or her parents. Treatment usually lasts a long time and includes a combination of the following:

1. Behavior modification therapy to help the child learn new ways of handling life situations in an acceptable way
2. Anger management training
3. Special education services if the child has learning disabilities
4. Medication, if the child has attention deficits and depression

### **WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

Katherine, Anne. *Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991.

Rosellini, Gayle, Worden, Mark, and Rosell, Garth. *Of Course You're Angry: A Guide to Dealing With the Emotions of Substance Abuse*. San Francisco: Harper Hazelden, 1986.

Williams, Redford, and Williams, Virginia. *Anger Kills: Seventeen Strategies for Controlling the Hostility That Can Harm Your Health*. New York: Time Books, 1993.

### **SEE THESE HANDOUTS ON RELATED TOPICS**

- Anxiety in Children
- Depression in Children and Teens
- Helping Kids Manage Angry Feelings
- Helping Kids Recover from Loss
- Helping Your Child Succeed in School
- How to Build Your Child's Self-Esteem
- How to Cope When Parenting Seems Overwhelming
- Positive Reinforcement (for Parents)
- Teaching Your Child to Respect Others

# **Conduct Disorder**



### **WHAT IS CONDUCT DISORDER?**

Half of all crimes are committed by a small number of people—about 5 percent of all adults and adolescents. The criminal behavior of this group of individuals is so disruptive and harmful that it is considered a mental disorder. When children and adolescents engage in extremely antisocial behavior, it is called a *conduct disorder*. In adulthood, a pattern of such behavior is called *antisocial personality disorder*.

### **CHILDREN WITH CONDUCT DISORDER ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE:**

- Parents with antisocial personality disorder
- Young mothers
- Mothers who smoked while they were pregnant
- A lack of parental supervision
- Physical and sexual abuse



- Low socioeconomic status
- Less verbal ability

Children and adolescents who have a conduct disorder show a lack of regard for the rights of others. Without help, they will further develop a pattern of antisocial behavior, and as adults, they will be self-seeking and selfish. Such behavior is viewed as unacceptable in our society.

More boys than girls engage in antisocial behavior. In children between the ages of 9 and 17, about 6 percent of boys and 3 percent of girls are conduct disordered.

### WHAT IS CONDUCT DISORDER?

Conduct disorder results in a significant impairment of functioning. It involves a **pattern** of behavior that includes several of the following:

- Breaking the rules
- Lying
- Getting into physical fights
- Physically harming another person with a weapon
- Threatening or intimidating people
- Being physically cruel to people or animals
- Forcing sexual activity on another person
- Deliberately destroying property
- Deliberately setting fires
- Stealing things from people, such as in robbery or mugging
- Stealing things when others are not present, such as in shoplifting or forgery
- Breaking into a car, house, or building

- Lying to get things from others
- Staying out at night without parental permission
- Running away from parents' or guardians' home and staying away overnight
- Frequently skipping school



### WHAT CAUSES CONDUCT DISORDER?

Children who develop conduct disorder often grow up in families with the following characteristics:

**Family beginnings.** Antisocial behavior starts in the family. It is generally passed from one generation to the next. This is because people who engage in antisocial behavior patterns are generally inadequate parents who treat their children in harmful ways. They lack the ability to properly supervise and discipline their children. Their parenting is inconsistent and unpredictable. They tend to be extremely lenient at some times and extremely strict at others.

**Parenting problems.** Men who are antisocial almost never parent their own children and rarely stay in contact with them. Antisocial mothers and fathers often inflict harsh physical punishment with their children, and it may even be considered child abuse. Antisocial parents are also more likely to inflict sexual abuse on their children. As a result of such hurtful and dangerous parenting, it is no surprise that the children in these families develop conduct disorder in a much higher proportion than do kids in normal families.

**An early start.** Conduct disorder usually starts in childhood or adolescence. The earlier such behavior begins, the more likely it will continue into adulthood. It often begins with crimes against property and becomes more aggressive, involving crimes against people, violence toward animals, and other hurtful acts. When a person first engages in antisocial behavior at puberty or after, the crimes tend to be less aggressive and it is less likely that the behavior will continue into adulthood. Being diagnosed with childhood conduct disorder is the strongest predictor that a person will develop antisocial personality disorder in adulthood. Unfortunately, a high percentage of such children have unsuccessful work and social lives as adults. People diagnosed with adolescent-onset conduct disorders tend to engage in less aggressive behavior and have a more positive outlook for success as an adult.

### COSTS AND RISKS

Kids who have conduct disorder have a greater chance of:

- More illness during their lifetimes
- More injuries and accidents
- Dying young

**But not always.** Engaging in antisocial behavior as a child or adolescent does *not* guarantee that these negative behavior patterns will continue as an adult. Some children and adolescents will overcome their problems and develop into productive adults. The most dangerous signs of future problems in children and teens are setting fires and harming animals. It is