

# A Family For Every Child Matching Assistance



*"We should not be asking who this child belongs to,  
but who belongs to this child."*

## Conduct Disorder

Conduct Disorder (CD) is a behavioral diagnosis given to children and adolescents who have a hard time following rules, behaving in a way that is socially acceptable, and are often viewed as 'bad' or troubled individuals. Conduct Disorder is characterized by physical aggressiveness, property destruction, lying, stealing, and violating rules or laws.



### *Causes of Conduct Disorder*

While there is no known exact cause of Conduct Disorder, it is thought that biological and social factors play a role.

#### Biological

- Parent history of psychiatric illness
- Memory problems
- Motor delays
- Learning disabilities
- Brain damage

#### Social

- History of trauma, abuse (physical and sexual), and neglect
- Parental substance abuse
- Familial conflict
- Parent or caregiver exhibits antisocial behaviors and tendencies
- Institutionalization at an early age
- Inconsistent parenting

Conduct Disorders can also coexist with other mental health disorders, such as ADHD, mood disorders, PTSD, learning disabilities, and also substance abuse issues. Sometimes what appears to be Conduct Disorder is actually a different behavioral disorder, such as ADHD or Oppositional Defiant Disorder.

Given the common reasons children come into foster care (abuse, neglect, parental substance abuse), it's easy to see how a child's past trauma and learned "survival" skills could be effecting their current behavior and level of functioning. Understanding your child's past trauma history will be key to helping them work through their current behaviors, and overcome or at the very least manage their diagnosis.

It's important to note that some of the characteristics of Conduct Disorder (lying, stealing, skipping school) may be present in adolescents who are not even remotely close to being diagnosed with Conduct Disorder. In order to be given the diagnosis of Conduct Disorder, the child or adolescent must be exhibiting at least 3 symptoms over the last 12 months, and at least 1 symptom in the last 6-months to a degree in which they significantly impair their daily functioning and the relationships with those around them. [\[Source\]](#) However, if you suspect your child may have Conduct Disorder seek out a therapist specializing in adoption issues immediately to have your child evaluated.



## *Treatment*

Similar to Oppositional Defiant Disorder, the most effective treatments for Conduct Disorder are as follows:

- Parent Management Training
- Individual Therapy
- Family Therapy
- Social Skills Trainings
- AF-CBT
- Special Education classes (for learning disabilities)
- Behavioral Therapy (to address significant behavioral issues)

In many cases, a child or adolescent will benefit from a combination of the trainings listed above. In addition, it is important to determine some of the other issues going on with a child, like learning disorders, mood disorders, trauma issues, and other behavior disorders. Treating these underlying disorders can be effective in the overall treatment of Conduct Disorder. In some cases, medication may also be helpful in treating Conduct Disorder. It should be noted, however, that medication alone is not helpful in treating Conduct Disorder and works best when coupled with a treatment listed above.

Parents should keep in mind that every child is different, and what works for one child may not work for their child. Parents should seek out a therapist who is skilled and understanding of adoption issues, and ask for their professional opinion on what they think the best course of treatment is for their child. Parents should explore all their treatment options, and work alongside a child's therapist to come up with a plan that makes the most sense for their family.



## *Additional Information & Resources*

AACAP - [Conduct Disorder](#)

AACAP - [Conduct Disorder Resource Center](#)

AFP - [Conduct Disorder: Diagnosis and Treatment in Primary Care](#)

Alternatives for Families: A Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy - [AF-CBT](#)

Child Welfare Information Gateway - [AF-CBT](#)

