

**Maryland School Mental Health Alliance\***  
*Oppositional and Defiant Children*  
*Information for Parents and Caregivers*

**Definition**

All children are oppositional from time to time, especially if they are tired, 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.

Students with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) show a pattern of negative, hostile, and defiant behavior that lasts at least 6 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 his or her mistakes or misbehavior, and being easily annoyed by others.

**Why do we care?**

Five to fifteen percent of school-age children have ODD. When compared to their peers, children with ODD are more likely to have difficulties with academic performance, and may engage in risky behaviors including criminal activities and substance use. Without intervention, children with ODD are more likely to develop other problems including a conduct disorder, which involves a range of behaviors including destruction of property, aggression towards people and animals, lying, stealing, and serious violation of rules.

**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 school psychologists, clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, nurse practitioners, psychiatrists and pediatricians.
  
- **Specific strategies to use at home include:**
  - Set up a daily school-home note system with your child's teacher(s)
  - Be consistent
  - Have set rules and consequences
  - Use praise and rewards frequently
  - Set up a reward system at home
  - Identify a homework buddy or tutor to help with homework
  - Identify a mental health professional who can help you to set up a behavioral management program
  - Ask your therapist to improve social relationships by:
    - systematic teaching of social skills in a social skills group
    - 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 in developing a close friendship

## Helpful Forms and Handouts

- **AACAP Facts for Families:** [http://www.aacap.org/info\\_families/index.htm](http://www.aacap.org/info_families/index.htm).
  - *Oppositional Defiant Disorder:* <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/72.htm>.
  - *Conduct Disorder:* <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/conduct.htm>.
  - *Violent Behavior:* <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/behavior.htm>.
- **National Mental Health Association.** *Fact Sheet on Conduct Disorder:* <http://www.nmha.org/infoctr/factsheets/74.cfm>.
- **Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder in Children and Adolescents: Diagnoses and Treatment** by Dr. Jim Chandler:  
[http://jamesdauntchandler.tripod.com/ODD\\_CD/oddcdpamphlet.pdf](http://jamesdauntchandler.tripod.com/ODD_CD/oddcdpamphlet.pdf)
- **The Mayo Clinic** discusses everything from the definition of ODD to lifestyle and home remedies to help change behaviors association with the disorder.  
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/oppositional-defiant-disorder/DS00630>

*\*Developed by the Center for School Mental Health (<http://csmh.umaryland.edu>) in collaboration with the Maryland School Mental Health Alliance.*