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Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

Does your child have temper tantrums all the time? Does he seem angrier than other children? Does he break a lot of rules - on purpose? Your child could have oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). You can get help.

What is ODD?

ODD is a medical problem that makes people seem angry. A lot of children have ODD. In fact, it's one of the most common behavior problems in children. (About 1 in 20 children has it.) Most children get better with help.

In young children, more boys have ODD than girls. But for teens and adults, the same number of males and females have it. More children who are deaf have ODD behaviors.

People with ODD can have other problems; sometimes sorting out the problem is hard because some of the behaviors are the same. Some problems that can be confused with ODD are

- [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\)](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/adhd/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/adhd/>)
- [Depression](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/depression/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/depression/>)
- Bipolar disorder
- Mild [autism](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/autism/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/autism/>) and other developmental disorders

If you think your child might have ODD, then you have a very tough job ahead of you. Keep on reading. You can help your child.

Causes of ODD

No one knows for sure what causes ODD. Some children with ODD develop these behaviors by copying what they see at home. But many children with ODD have no family members with this problem.

Signs of ODD

All children get angry sometimes. It's normal to have temper tantrums once in a while. Young children can't always control their anger - just think about the "terrible twos!" Teenagers also have outbursts of anger.

Children with ODD seem angrier than other children. They can:

- Lose their tempers a few times a week or more
- Argue with parents and other adults often
- Break rules on purpose
- Annoy people around them on purpose
- Blame other people for their mistakes or bad behavior

Problems can start to show up as early as ages 1 to 3. Usually there are signs by age 8. A lot of the problems with ODD are normal for children who are 2 years old. But for children with ODD, the problems don't get better or go away as they get older.

Anger in children with hearing loss

Deaf children can have ODD, just like hearing children. But sometimes, deaf children can seem angrier than normal without having ODD. They can become very frustrated when they can't say what they want to say, or when they can't understand what other people are saying.

Some parents of deaf or hard-of-hearing children say their children were very angry all the time, until they learned to communicate better. When the children and families learned sign language, or when the children learned to read lips, most of the anger seemed to go away.

If your child seems angrier than most children, it might be because he's frustrated. Think about whether or not your child has problems communicating. Read our [communication \(http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/communicating/\)](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/communicating/) section for more information.

Other children who are deaf have good communication with their parents but have taken control of the household. Sometimes this happens because so much attention has been given to satisfying this child that he's learned that tantrums work very well. Some family members feel sorry for the deaf child and want to make him happy. That child doesn't need to communicate with his family - only point, gesture, push or take things that he wants. This gives a child the wrong message.

What happens to children with ODD?

With the right help, some of the signs of ODD can get better. Some children outgrow ODD completely, but that doesn't happen very often. Doctors don't know why this happens to some children, but not to others.

In some children, a bad case of ODD can turn into **conduct disorder** as the child gets older. Conduct disorder is a serious problem. In some ways, conduct disorder is just a worse version of ODD. It usually starts a few years after ODD starts, if it's going to happen at all.

Signs of conduct disorder are:

- Hurting other people and animals on purpose
- Starting fights
- Skipping school often, starting before age 13
- Running away from home more than once, without coming back for a long time
- Stealing
- Breaking the law
- Abusing alcohol and drugs

Normally, only the very worst cases of ODD turn into conduct disorder. Milder cases of ODD don't. Most of the time, getting help for the ODD can prevent conduct disorder. You must let your child know that there are rules in your home and in the community. Help him understand that what he does can hurt others, as well as himself.

How You Can Help Your Child

Get help for your child as soon as possible! Your child's behavior will get better, making everyone's life easier. Your child will also be less likely to get worse if you get help now.

The main way of treating ODD is through therapy. If you think your child has ODD, write some notes about his behavior. Then take him to a psychologist or psychiatrist who knows about both ODD and deafness, and bring your notes with you. Try to find a therapist who communicates in a way that your child can understand. If your child uses sign language, look for someone who knows sign language well.

The therapist will probably want to have some sessions alone with your child, and some sessions with everyone in the family. In the sessions with the whole family, the therapist will help you plan ways to deal with your child's behavior. Many therapists will help you develop a behavior plan, to teach your child new behaviors and change those old habits. It can take many sessions until you see improvements in your child's behavior. It's very important for you to stay calm, and be consistent. If your behavior plan says that your son can't watch any more TV that day, you must follow through as planned. This will help him learn what to expect from you and others. If your son has a tantrum, stay calm and remember your plan.

These are the most important things you can do to stop this problem:

- Be sure that your communication is clear and as deep as can be. Many children develop ODD behaviors out of frustration and the lack of communication.
- Find other deaf children and adults for your child to meet. They can help cut down on the ODD-related problems by acting as role models.
- Find ways to help your child become successful at something, anything. Praising your child for good behavior, fewer tantrums and better self-control is the most helpful thing you can do to help your child with ODD.

Children with ODD do not usually take medicine to help, unless they also have other problems that need medicine, like [ADHD](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/adhd/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/adhd/>).

Learn more about ODD

- Read the [Pediatric Psychiatry Pamphlet about ODD](http://monsoon.klis.com/chandler/pamphlet/oddc/oddcdpamphlet.htm) (<http://monsoon.klis.com/chandler/pamphlet/oddc/oddcdpamphlet.htm>).
- Read about [ODD on AHealthyMe.com](http://www.ahealthyme.com/topic/odd;jsessionid=RJZH1ZJMMPR3YCTYAIRS4EQ#3) (<http://www.ahealthyme.com/topic/odd;jsessionid=RJZH1ZJMMPR3YCTYAIRS4EQ#3>).
- Read [other parents' thoughts about their children's ODD](http://forum.conductdisorders.com/ubbcgi/ultimatebb.cgi) (<http://forum.conductdisorders.com/ubbcgi/ultimatebb.cgi>) on the conduct disorders forums.

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You can find this page online at:

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/odd/>