

What is disruptive behavior?

Disruptive behavior is a pattern of anger and outbursts that doesn't get better and leads to other problems. Children with disruptive behavior do not listen and follow directions. Their behaviors disrupt people around them. They may seem to be difficult on purpose. They may argue with adults. They often get angry and aggressive, even after getting a consequence for being disruptive.

How can I help my child manage their behaviors?

At home

- Look for good behavior and praise your child right away. Be specific. Tell them what was good about their behavior.
- Help your child change their negative behavior by praising them when they do choose a positive behavior. For example, if your child often takes toys from their siblings, catch them asking for an item instead of simple taking it. Then praise them for asking.
- Give your child rules that are clear and brief.
- Make sure your child understands the rules and consequences for breaking the rules. A consequence is what happens when a rule is broken. A consequence might be a time-out or not being able to watch TV. It should not be hitting.
- Respond the same way every time a rule is broken.
 - Remain calm and do not yell.
 - Tell your child when they have broken a rule as soon as it happens.
 - Explain the consequence right away.
 - They will not understand how the broken rule caused the consequence if there is a lot of time between the two.
- Choose realistic goals for behavior change. Try to change one negative behavior at a time.

At School

- Work with your child's school to help manage disruptive behavior. Talk with your child's school about making a special plan on how to deal with your child's behavior. This plan is called an Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- Teach the school staff that your child's disruptive behavior might mean they are upset or find the school work hard to do. Their behavior may be their way of asking for help.
- Your child does need to do their schoolwork. They should not be allowed to skip their work because of their behavior.
- Find a way to talk with your child's teacher each day to find out how your child is doing.
- Consequences for negative behavior at school should be done at school. Your child should not have consequences at home for something that happened at school.

How is disruptive behavior treated?

Certain behavior problems that do not improve in response to the above suggestions may need formal treatment. Treatment may include:

- Outpatient Psychotherapy. Your child will share their feelings and learn new ways to solve problems and control their feelings.
- Parent Training. Parents learn how to help their child behave and communicate better.
- Medicine. Medicine should not be used on its own. It should be used along with the other kinds of treatment listed above. Talk to your primary care provider to learn about medicines that may be best for your child. Other providers, like a psychiatrist, may help decide what medicines are best. The provider you work with will follow up with you and your child to see if the medicine is working well.

Please contact one of the following therapists to enroll your child in outpatient psychotherapy:

Other helpful resources:

- Disciplining your child:
<https://kidshealth.org/ChildrensWI/en/parents/discipline.html?WT.ac=ctg#catbehavior>
- Temper tantrums:
<https://kidshealth.org/ChildrensWI/en/parents/tantrums.html?WT.ac=ctg#catbehavior>
- Taming tempers:
<https://kidshealth.org/ChildrensWI/en/parents/temper.html?WT.ac=ctg#catbehavior>

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.