

# Serious behavioural difficulties

## Persistent and severe

All children test the limits you set and try to cross boundaries some of the time. This is all part of growing up, learning and becoming an independent person.

In a small minority of children behavioural problems become persistent and severe, such as when a child gets stuck in a pattern of challenging behaviour, they often feel unhappy, unsafe and out of control (and so do their parents). Characterised by repeated and persistent bad behaviour much worse than would normally be expected in a child of that age. This can occur in children of all ages but more often starts in early life, with it being more common in boys than girls.

Signs of behavioural problems can present in many ways from aggression, refusing to speak and tics to repeated head banging. You know your child best. If you are worried, discuss with your health visitor or GP. Some children may need to be referred to a specialist where they can get the help they need.

Don't feel you have to cope alone. Talk to your health visitor or GP, ask about support groups and local parenting programmes. Parents of children with behavioural problems need help and support too, don't be afraid to ask.

## Conduct disorder

Sometimes, a child's behaviour can affect their development and interfere with their ability to live a 'normal' life. When behaviour is such a problem, it is called a conduct disorder.

### Signs to look out for:

- Aggression to people and animals (pets).
- Destruction of property and breaking things.
- Never doing as asked, ignoring all rules and instructions.
- Being distant and secretive.

Source: [www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk) [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg158](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg158)

## How it affects families

Involving and **supporting all the family** is very important. Family members fear the child may hit out at them and feel embarrassed or even ashamed about how they act.

Behavioural problems can cause a lot of distress to children, their siblings, families and local communities.

As a parent, it can be easy to ignore your child when they are being good and only pay attention to them when they are behaving badly. Over time, the child learns that they only get attention when they are breaking the rules. Parents can get over sensitive and stressed, even when they are just acting like any other toddler.

Parenting programmes can advise you on how to access the support you need, and share experiences with others who are facing similar problems with their own children. These groups can offer training in helping you encourage positive behaviour in your child.

**1**

My child's bad behaviour seems to go far beyond that of his nursery friends.

**2**

He is aggressive and hits out. He always plays alone, other kids keep out of his way.

**3**

Talk to your health visitor. There is lots of support and help available.