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# Antisocial personality disorder

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## Overview

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Antisocial personality disorder, sometimes called sociopathy, is a mental disorder in which a person consistently shows no regard for right and wrong and ignores the rights and feelings of others. People with antisocial personality disorder tend to antagonize, manipulate or treat others harshly or with callous indifference. They show no guilt or remorse for their behavior.

Individuals with antisocial personality disorder often violate the law, becoming criminals. They may lie, behave violently or impulsively, and have problems with drug and alcohol use. Because of these characteristics, people with this disorder typically can't fulfill responsibilities related to family, work or school.

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## Symptoms

Antisocial personality disorder signs and symptoms may include:

- Disregard for right and wrong
- Persistent lying or deceit to exploit others
- Being callous, cynical and disrespectful of others
- Using charm or wit to manipulate others for personal gain or personal pleasure
- Arrogance, a sense of superiority and being extremely opinionated
- Recurring problems with the law, including criminal behavior
- Repeatedly violating the rights of others through intimidation and dishonesty
- Impulsiveness or failure to plan ahead
- Hostility, significant irritability, agitation, aggression or violence
- Lack of empathy for others and lack of remorse about harming others
- Unnecessary risk-taking or dangerous behavior with no regard for the safety of self or others
- Poor or abusive relationships
- Failure to consider the negative consequences of behavior or learn from them
- Being consistently irresponsible and repeatedly failing to fulfill work or financial obligations

Adults with antisocial personality disorder typically show symptoms of conduct disorder before the age of 15. Signs and symptoms of conduct disorder include serious, persistent behavior problems, such as:

- Aggression toward people and animals
- Destruction of property
- Deceitfulness
- Theft
- Serious violation of rules

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Although antisocial personality disorder is considered lifelong, in some people, certain symptoms — particularly destructive and criminal behavior — may decrease over time. But it's not clear whether this decrease is a result of aging or an increased awareness of the consequences of antisocial behavior.

## When to see a doctor

People with antisocial personality disorder are unlikely to seek help on their own. If you suspect that a friend or family member may have the disorder, you might gently suggest that the person seek help from a mental health professional and offer to help them find one.

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## Causes

Personality is the combination of thoughts, emotions and behaviors that makes everyone unique. It's the way people view, understand and relate to the outside world, as well as how they see themselves. Personality forms during childhood, shaped through an interaction of inherited tendencies and environmental factors.

The exact cause of antisocial personality disorder isn't known, but:

- Genes may make you vulnerable to developing antisocial personality disorder — and life situations may trigger its development
- Changes in the way the brain functions may have resulted during brain development

## Risk factors

Certain factors seem to increase the risk of developing antisocial personality disorder, such as:

- Diagnosis of childhood conduct disorder
- Family history of antisocial personality disorder or other personality disorders or mental health disorders

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- Being subjected to abuse or neglect during childhood
- Unstable, violent or chaotic family life during childhood

Men are at greater risk of having antisocial personality disorder than women are.

## Complications

Complications, consequences and problems of antisocial personality disorder may include, for example:

- Spouse abuse or child abuse or neglect
- Problems with alcohol or substance use
- Being in jail or prison
- Homicidal or suicidal behaviors
- Having other mental health disorders such as depression or anxiety
- Low social and economic status and homelessness
- Premature death, usually as a result of violence

## Prevention

There's no sure way to prevent antisocial personality disorder from developing in those at risk. Because antisocial behavior is thought to have its roots in childhood, parents, teachers and pediatricians may be able to spot early warning signs. It may help to try to identify those most at risk, such as children who show signs of conduct disorder, and then offer early intervention.

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