



SA Federation for  
Mental Health

## PERSONALITY DISORDERS

### ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER

#### What it is:

Antisocial personality disorder is characterised by a persistent pattern of violation and disregard of the rights of others, and this behaviour begins in childhood or early adolescence. This disorder has also been referred to as psychopathy or sociopathy. Antisocial personality disorder can only be diagnosed if the individual is 18 years or older, however they must have a history of displaying some of the symptoms of conduct disorder before this age, which then continue into adulthood. Individuals with antisocial personality disorder repeatedly perform acts that go against societal norms and they may disregard or break the law on more than one occasion. They may engage in behaviour such as destroying property, physically assaulting or abusing others or theft. Individuals with this disorder typically lack empathy, and disregard the wishes, feelings or rights of others. They may also be manipulative or deceitful for either personal profit or pleasure.

Individuals with antisocial personality disorder typically display behaviour that is irresponsible, they may fail to plan ahead and may make impulsive decisions, and this can impact on their ability to keep a steady job. They may also show financial irresponsibility by incurring large debts, or failing to provide financial support to dependants. Individuals with this disorder often also engage in spousal or child abuse and neglect. These individuals may justify or rationalise their behaviour towards others, for example by saying that they are just looking out for themselves, or that certain people deserve to be mistreated.

#### Common symptoms

1. Repeatedly performing acts that are against the law, and are grounds for arrest. For example, destruction of property, theft or physical assault
2. Deceitfulness or manipulation. For example, repeatedly lying or conning others, whether for personal profit or pleasure
3. Impulsivity or failure to plan ahead
4. Aggression or irritability. For example, frequent physical fights or assaults on others
5. A reckless disregard the safety of others as well as personal safety
6. Frequent irresponsible behaviour. For example, the failure to keep a steady job, or the failure to meet financial obligations

7. A lack of remorse for negative behaviour. This may include a rationalisation or justification of the acts
8. The individual displayed symptoms of conduct disorder as a child/adolescent



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### **Causes:**

There are a number of risk factors that could contribute to the development of antisocial personality disorder. Conduct disorder and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder in childhood increases the likelihood of developing the disorder as an adult. Childhood abuse and neglect may also increase the chances of conduct disorder developing into antisocial personality disorder. The disorder is also more common among first degree relatives of and individual with antisocial personality disorder. The prevalence of the disorder has also been found to be higher in areas of low socioeconomic status and urban settings.