

# Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

## What is ODD?

ODD is a childhood disorder where young people exhibit a pattern of hostile, disobedient and defiant behaviours. These behaviours are usually directed at adults in positions of perceived authority.

As opposed to Pathological Demand Avoidance, which is a neurodevelopmental condition, ODD is usually developed as a result of experiences and the environment around the young person. There are studies which show tentative links to genetic inheritance although this research is hard to corroborate due to the impossibility of removal of environmental factors.

ODD is most commonly thought of as a learned behaviour usually as a result of ineffective discipline, abuse or neglect, trauma or parental modelling of behaviours concurrent with ODD.

## Challenges faced by young people with ODD

- Irritability, stubbornness, rigidity of thought, aggression.
- Challenges with emotional control and self-regulation.
- Challenges with seeing things from others point of view.
- Young people with ODD find emotional intelligence difficult and struggle to comprehend others emotions.
- Due to the severity of their emotional responses to situations young people with ODD often struggle to form and maintain relationships.
- Their need to “win” in an argument often outweighs their view of the potential sanction i.e. young people with ODD will often continue to argue even when they understand they are wrong in an attempt to “win” an argument. Adults increasing the severity of the sanction often has little to no impact on the young persons behaviour.
- Young people with ODD find it very difficult to see their role in a situation, preferring to blame others. They often don't see themselves as being argumentative or defiant and instead feel like they are being picked on.
- Young people with ODD are disproportionately more likely to exhibited peer on peer abuse as they grow older.
- They can deliberately try to provoke others into arguments. For some pupils “arguing” or dysregulation actually becomes a habitual part of their daily routine to the extent that they need it in order to feel normal.
- Being compliant can sometimes feel like a defeat for the young person.
- The defiant behaviour and apparent malice that sometimes accompanies it makes forming relationships with adults difficult.

## Strategies to support young people with ODD

### Communication

- Avoid as all costs being dragged into an argument. This is counter productive as the young person will most likely be unable to change their perspective on the event during the discussion. Even if the adult does “win” in the argument, the young person is likely to feel an increased level of frustration and resentment meaning the next episode of dysregulation is likely to be more extreme.
- For some young people with ODD the confrontation is what they are looking for. By not giving them the confrontation you break the negative behaviour cycle and reduce the chances of the young person exhibiting the same behaviours in the future.
- Young people benefit from structure and boundaries. If an adult states that a sanction will be given it is essential that the young person attends. If traditional sanctions are given they school staff should attempt to use the time to restore relationships.
- Adults should remember that the young person with ODD is often just “relationship seeking” (attention needing). Try to redirect the young person away from the confrontational behaviour by providing positive attention in another way.
- Ask the young person to voice their opinion. Give them full attention and listen to all of their points of view. When they have finished ask them if they would like to add anything else to the conversation. Ask the young person if they would like their point of view formally recorded. Feeling “listened to” is central to a young person with ODD. Adults can use the positive listening skills they have exhibited during this conversation as modelling of good practice for the young person. When a young person has said all they need to they are more likely to be in an emotionally ready place to listen themselves.
- Reiterate to the young person on a regular basis that their behaviour is not going to stop you trying to help them.
- A zones of regulation approach can be useful for staff. Having a good understanding of the young person's trigger in each zone, their regulation strategies, and the length of time it takes for the young person to regulate can help de-escalate the situation.
- Use a low volume and non-confrontational tone when speaking.
- Try not to show negative emotions towards the young person when they have done something wrong. Try to state as simply as possible the consequence and then remove yourself from the situation or conversation. It may be necessary to ignore secondary behaviours.
- Most schools report training all pupils on the school behaviour system has a big impact on the standard of behaviour. This allows pupils to know that the teacher may be ignoring behaviours at the time but that young person misbehaving will still receive a sanction at a later date.
- Consider the messages your own body language may be sending the pupil. Often a seated position feels less threatening for a young person. Adults who

are larger in stature need to be acutely aware of the impact this may have on a young person with ODD.

- Adults should try to avoid showing they are upset with the young person but can allow the young person to know that they have upset them. It is important that the young person over time gains an understanding of how their behaviours effect other people emotionally. (using this strategy will need to be decided on a case by case basis).
- Adults will need to remember that it is rare that they are the cause of the pupils behaviour and should try to not take it personally. It may sometimes even be appropriate for an adult to choose to be the outlet for a young person's emotions.

### Classroom

- Young people with ODD benefit from having fewer, clearly stated behaviour expectations. i.e. "Allow others to learn".
- Often the scale of the defiance means that the schools behaviour system will need reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of the young person – if this doesn't happen they may very quickly end up with sanctions making forming positive relationships very difficult.
- Young people are far more likely to be motivated by rewards than the fear of a sanction. Positive comment only behaviour reports can help act as a diary for the young person to show them how often they have showed positive learning behaviours.
- Setting the young person achievable "personal best" targets is a useful approach. Even if the young persons behaviour is far from what others in the class may be exhibiting they are still able to achieve success by meeting the specific goals set for them on their personal best report for example. i.e "Remain on task for 5 minutes before taking a brain break" or "use positive language to congratulate another pupil once during the lesson".
- Outstanding differentiation and scaffolding of work is needed. It may be necessary to target the work at a slightly easier level than the young person is capable of in order to allow them to build up a succession of positive events in class.
- Adults should try and model non-confrontational behaviour with all other adults and young people in the class. Often young people with ODD will try and "piggy back" or even take over the behavioural events of other pupils.
- Exit strategies from class should be discussed with the young person. Sometimes an episode of dysregulated behaviour will occur for very little reason. Adults should try not to get disheartened by this.
- Discuss concerns about behaviour with the young person away from the rest of the class and in private.
- If a young person needs brain breaks ensure there are planned activities. Downtime can be counter productive for young people with ODD if used inappropriately.
- Leaders, teachers and support staff in schools will need to develop positive relationships with parents and involve them as much as is appropriate.

Schools need to be particularly careful with the amount of negative phone calls and letters home that have to be made. Schools should try and keep the parents rhetoric about school positive.

- Where the behaviour of parents is a concern schools should consider the advice or support of social care or particular agencies that can support complicated family situations that exist in most areas. Schools in BANES should consider the BANES referral list, early help app or the Alternative provision directory.

### Break and lunchtime

- Where at all possible schools should consider how young people with ODD access break and lunchtime.
- It may be possible to engage young people with ODD in clubs or more formal activities that can be monitored by staff.
- Ensure all staff have an awareness of the young persons needs and likely behaviours as well as the regulation strategies needed.
- As opposed to some of the other conditions covered in the "Outreach toolkit" it may be necessary to remove the young person with ODD from break or lunchtime in the traditional sense in order to keep themselves and others safe.
- Wherever possible try to limit the access the young person has to areas of the school that are crowded and noisy during unstructured times.
- It is often helpful to gain the young persons voice when planning their lunchtime and breacktime activities.
- It can be helpful if adults work with the young person to prepare them for situations they are likely to face. Making use of consequence or decision map or social stories have been shown to be effective ways of improving behaviour at lunch and break.