

## Oppositional Defiance Disorder

Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) is characterised by challenges with relationship skills and an underdeveloped conscience which results in children who may:

- frequently behave in a challenging way to get a reaction
- respond adversely to praise
- have high levels of aggression
- purposefully annoy others
- be defiant
- be frequently argumentative
- be easily aggravated
- have sudden, unprovoked anger
- blame others for their mistakes or for their misbehaviour

## Strategies for dealing with Oppositional Defiance Disorder

There are some key evidence-based strategies that will help you address oppositional behaviours in children. It is important not to assume that using strategies that work well on other children or for other conditions will work for your child. It will take time and patience to find the right combination of strategies that work for your child and their unique circumstances.

### Relationship building

A strong relationship and a sense of trust is super important for children with ODD. As you build the connection with your child, you will see improvements in their challenging behaviour. Here are some other ways to build and strengthen your relationship:

- Validate your child's emotions eg. "you seem angry - can you tell me what's happening? (see tip sheet Name it to Tame it)
- Work hard to establish trust with your child by being fair and consistent
- Spend time having fun together and doing things your child enjoys
- Maintain close proximity to your child as much as possible during tasks so you can monitor closely for any signs of your child going off task and gently step in and help
- Be attune to their needs – especially learn potential triggers and their preferred calming strategies

### Language

The words we use really make a huge difference to how kids with ODD behave.

- At all times be clear – use simple, non-ambiguous language
- Avoid raising your voice or exhibiting any emotion
- State your directions (in simple, straightforward language) and repeat them without changing the wording, eg. "it is time to have your shower now - go to the shower please' or "it is time to put on your shoes - put them on now please"
- Avoid nagging – remember that increased attention for doing the wrong thing is what children with ODD are aiming for

- If you need to ask a question, ensure that there are two options to choose from as this allows the child to exert some control over the situation
- Avoid asking WHY questions – this can imply blame for kids with ODD
- Use a calm, professional and precise tone when relaying instructions
- If you are trying to help your child work through a situation that didn't go well, use open-ended questions, eg. "what do you think made you angry when you were with John?" or "where were you when you realised you had lost your drink bottle?"
- Avoid asking or telling kids to "calm down" - instead you could say, "when you are calm, you can come back"
- Avoid arguing, lecturing or threatening a child with ODD - they will most likely view your words as rewarding rather than as a punishment
- Be neutral and calm, using phrases like, "since you broke the rule, this is what you will happen"
- When possible, concede control to an object such as a clock, timer or the bell, eg. "be ready to go when the bell rings" rather than "I want you to get ready to go now"
- Use words that communicate curiosity and an open mind, eg. "I am wondering how that lamp was broken? or "what else do we need to know about what happened?"

### **Body language**

Kids will often respond more to the messages our body or face gives than the words we use. Some things to try:

- Keep close without being threatening
- Get down to their level
- Position your body next to, not in front of your child
- Lower your voice and keep body language neutral
- Avoid eye contact when a child is angry

### **Build on strengths and success**

We all do much better if we use our strengths to solve our problems. Using this concept we can help a child with ODD to live a more positive life. Some things to try:

- Discover what the child truly enjoys doing, such as participating in a sport or hobby
- Focus on what your child is good at and set them up as an expert when the opportunity arises, eg. teach the family about how to do a BMX bike jump
- Identify skills or attributes that you can reinforce
- Provide opportunities for your child to demonstrate the skills they do well
- Pay attention to the things your child likes or thinks are important, eg. if he/she likes free time on the computer, allow your child to earn their time on the computer by completing academic tasks, by earning points for appropriate behaviour or by reaching behavioural or academic goals
- An individualised reward system – students with ODD respond better to rewards than consequences

- If deemed helpful, devise a way to show the child that he or she is making progress - for example, use stickers, tokens or marks on a chart that could be traded for privileges or preferred tasks

## Expectations

Kids with ODD do much better if they have clear expectations, firm rules and boundaries. Expectations are better than rules (rules are likely to provoke defiance). Expectations are best when they are:

- Stated as a 'do' rather than a don't, eg. say "speak quietly" rather than "don't shout"
- Consistent and fair
- Kept to a minimum (choose your battles)

## Choice

Kids with ODD are often wanting control, so giving them a choice can be super effective. Some things to try:

- State your choices, then walk away, or stay nearby but don't keep talking. Give them time to process and decide. If they don't like the choice, don't engage. Repeat the choices and ask again. If they will not choose, they do not get to participate in their preferred activity.
- Offer choices of ways the student can comply with adult instructions- e.g. "Will you have a bath or a shower?"
- if I delay a behavioural conversation, how do I reassure the rest of the family's that I haven't ignored the behaviour? Perhaps speaking out loud the expectation that has not been met without singling out the child, eg. "we all know that kicking is not ok in our home"

## Consequences

It is important for kids with ODD to learn that actions have consequences. Some things to try:

- Make sure the negative consequence is something the child wishes to avoid
- Be like a referee who simply states the consequence and holds the player accountable - do not allow the child to argue, simply restate what happens when a rule is broken
- Positive consequences/rewards need to be immediate (on the day of) rather than being accrued over several days or weeks
- Work out your child's 'currency' (what motivates them?)
- Provide calm, private, monotone, non-emotional recognition when the student exhibits appropriate behaviour, eg. "good decision to come back into the room, (add your child's name)"
- Avoid direct praise because when you do, kids with ODD will often immediately do the opposite of what you say - instead, acknowledge progress by giving quiet feedback
- Try expressing praise as an impartial measure of improvement (for instance: "your noise level today is A+, 10 stars, 10/10")
- Praise your child for honesty with monotone, incremental feedback, eg. "Top marks for honesty"

## Other key points and tips

- Be as clear, immediate and consistent as possible
- Choose your battles - avoid asking kids to comply unless you really need to and you are prepared to see it through
- Kids with ODD can often have a heightened sense of perceived justice and injustice
- The function of the behaviours associated with ODD is often to engage people of authority in a tug-of-war or power play - the most important thing is to not engage in a battle that no one will win
- Simplify tasks when the student is unmotivated, eg. pack away just ONE iPad/book/texta to ensure all adult-directed tasks are completed before moving onto the next activity
- When asking a child to recount an incident that he/she has been involved with, ask them to recount it like a movie script/scene, eg. What happened first? Who was there? What happened next? After that?
- Disruptive or non-compliant behaviour tends to escalate when a child has unsupervised free time and unclear expectations - a strict daily routine lets the student know what to expect
- Allow opportunities to earn back trust and catch your child with integrity, eg. 10/10 for being honest
- If a child throws objects, wait until they are calm and then direct them to pick it up with your assistance, eg. say “you need to pick up the books now, I’ll help you” then model the correct behaviour by starting to pick up the books or suggest a race
- End tasks during a moment of success or achievement
- Believe in the child’s ability to manage his/her behaviour in an appropriate way
- Display family expectations and a daily schedule so that your child knows what to expect - when the schedule changes or a different activity has been scheduled, prepare children with ODD individually
- Introduce a visual choice board (containing up to four images) to redirect/ encourage a child to independently engage in a range of activities
- Decide what behaviour you will ignore and what you will not accept - communicate the consequences for bad behaviour
- Show empathy and understanding once signs of calm are established, however maintain boundaries/limits
- Remind your child that you are not the cause of their defiance but rather its outlet, eg. “You are frustrated with that task (not with me)”

## Reactions to avoid when dealing with a child with ODD

1. Criticism – especially public criticism
2. Sarcasm
3. Threats
4. Questioning - asking children to explain why they misbehave
5. Trying to reason with kids in an attempt to improve their behaviour/performance
6. Arguing - trying to convince them that you are right and they are wrong
7. Force (physical or verbal)
8. Portraying a sense of hopelessness - this is a desirable outcome for a child with ODD