



OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER (ODD)

Reintegrate School Toolkit

Supporting Children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

What is Oppositional Defiant Disorder?

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) is a childhood behavioural disorder defined by a persistent pattern of **hostile, disobedient, and defiant behaviour** towards adults or authority figures.

While all children can display challenging behaviour during certain developmental stages (e.g., toddlerhood, adolescence), ODD is different. It is **more frequent, more intense, and more disruptive** than typical “testing” behaviour.

ODD may develop due to a combination of factors:

- Inconsistent, harsh, or overly permissive discipline.
- Lack of structure or supervision at home.
- Emotional unavailability of parents due to illness, separation, or stress.
- Trauma, neglect, or abuse.
- Developmental delays in emotional regulation or processing.
- Learned oppositional patterns from parental role models.
- Possible genetic or familial links.

Challenges Facing Children with ODD

Early Childhood

- Frequent temper tantrums (sometimes lasting over 30 minutes).
- Irritability, stubbornness, and aggression.
- Extreme rigidity and inability to compromise.
- Tantrums triggered by seemingly trivial issues.

School-Age Children

- Persistent defiance and refusal to follow instructions.
- Easily angered and agitated; often appear resentful.
- Frequent arguments with adults, often escalating quickly.
- Blame others for their mistakes.
- Provocative behaviour designed to “push buttons.”
- Difficulty sustaining friendships due to hostility or blame-shifting.
- May struggle to recognise their own role in conflict.

Adolescents

- Stealing, lying, or deliberately annoying others.
- Verbal aggression and taunting of peers (bullying behaviours).
- Direct opposition to authority figures (teachers, parents).
- May link with other conditions such as ADHD, anxiety, or depression.

Recognising Children with ODD

To consider a diagnosis, behaviour must persist for **at least 6 months** and include **four or more** of the following:

- Frequent temper loss.
- Regular arguments with adults.
- Refusal to follow rules or instructions.
- Deliberate attempts to annoy others.
- Consistent blame-shifting.
- Easily annoyed or irritable.
- Angry, resentful, or spiteful.

Supporting Strategies

1. Communication

- **Do not engage in arguments** – avoid the “battle of wills.”
- Stay calm and neutral; use a steady tone of voice.
- Avoid showing frustration – negative reactions reinforce their behaviour.
- Do not attempt to reason with the child while they are dysregulated. Wait until calm is restored.
- Use short, clear instructions, allowing “take-up time” for compliance.
- Avoid public confrontations – discuss concerns privately.
- Model respectful listening: let them finish speaking before responding.

2. Classroom Strategies

- Establish **2–3 clear behavioural goals** (e.g., following instructions, accepting “no”) and reinforce them consistently.
- Display expectations visually; review them daily with the child.
- Reward success with **praise and incentives**, but remain positive if targets are missed.
- Check work is pitched appropriately – too hard may trigger refusal, too easy may lead to disruption.
- Plan for **structured transitions**; minimise unstructured “downtime.”
- Build a positive relationship – look for moments to connect through jobs, responsibilities, or shared interests.

- Avoid “power struggles” – pick your battles and focus on priority behaviours.
- Provide a **cool-down space** inside or just outside the classroom.
- Use planned, calm responses to escalation – avoid raising your voice.
- Don’t take the behaviour personally – see the child’s actions as communication of need, not personal attack.

3. Building Positive Relationships

- Model calm, respectful interactions – many ODD children may not have seen these at home.
- Give opportunities for success and leadership (e.g., modelling a task).
- Provide positive attention throughout the day, not just in response to behaviour.
- Work collaboratively with parents/carers – ODD children may “play” adults against each other. Consistency is key.
- If parental engagement is challenging, seek external agency support.

4. Playtime and Lunchtime Support

- Recognise these are high-risk times due to lack of structure.
- Provide **structured games** and monitor competitiveness.
- Where necessary, arrange **alternative supervised activities indoors**.
- Ensure adequate adult supervision in the dining hall and playground.
- Be alert to food-related triggers (choice, temperature, smells).
- Consider quieter lunch spaces for children overwhelmed by busy dining halls.
- Remember exercise is important – if alternative provision replaces outdoor play, ensure physical activity is provided elsewhere.

Key Principles to Remember

- **Avoid conflict:** ODD children are motivated by “winning the battle,” not avoiding punishment.
- **Rewards work better than sanctions:** punishment often reinforces defiance.
- **Structure and consistency:** predictable routines help reduce triggers.
- **Positive attention:** seek out opportunities to notice and praise good behaviour.
- **Calm adult responses:** children mirror the adult’s regulation.
- **Pick battles carefully:** focus on safety and key behaviour goals rather than every incident.
- **Relationships first:** strong, positive connections are the foundation for progress.

Useful Resources

- [Daily Strength – ODD Support Group](#)

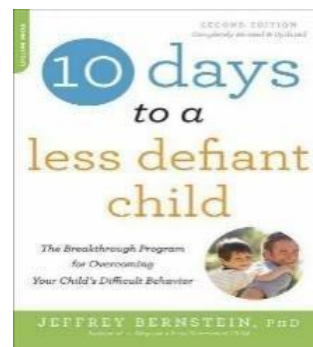
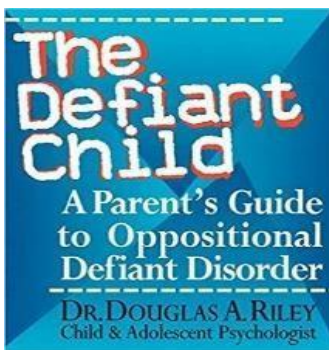
Key Takeaway

Children with ODD are not “bad” but are struggling with regulation, relationships, and control.

Effective support requires **calm, consistent, structured approaches** and a refusal to engage in conflict.

With the right support, children with ODD can learn positive ways to manage emotions, build relationships, and achieve success in school.

Suggested reading:



The Defiant Child – Dr Douglas A Riley

10 Days to a Less Defiant Child – Jeffrey Bernstein