



Supporting a Child with Oppositional Defiant Disorder:

A Guide for Parents



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Oppositional defiant disorder, often abbreviated as ODD, is a mental health condition characterised by frequent and persistent patterns of anger and irritability along with defiance towards authority figures, such as parents and teachers.



What are the symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder?

It is perfectly normal for most children to show defiance towards their parents from time to time. However, a child with ODD will find that the behaviours outlined below are frequent and persistent and may cause problems with daily life, including in forming healthy relationships.

They might:

be persistently angry

be consistently irritable

be resentful

hold grudges

seek revenge

seek arguments, particularly with authority figures

actively resist or defy rules and requests

seek conflict with others

blame others

be vindictive

What causes oppositional defiant disorder?

The cause of ODD is currently unknown, although it is thought that there might be a genetic factor. We do know ODD often co-occurs with ADHD.



How can oppositional defiant disorder affect a child?

ODD can impact all areas of a child's life. It is important to remember that ODD is a mental health condition and that children with ODD are particularly vulnerable. Outward bravado can hide low self-esteem.

ODD can make it difficult for children to form positive relationships with peers and adults. This can affect their learning as well as their home life and friendships.

Because of the behaviours that characterise ODD, children may become excluded or ostracised from their peers or community.



What support is available for children with oppositional defiant disorder?

There is no 'cure' for ODD. The goal is to support your child in managing their symptoms. In most cases, treatment is in the form of therapy.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

Talking therapies such as CBT are designed to help your child understand more about their behaviours and how they are linked with their thoughts and feelings.

Family therapy

Family therapy can help restore or strengthen relationships within the family home. It can provide a place for parents and siblings to feel understood, as well as support you to make positive changes to the way your family communicates and coexists.

Peer therapy

Peer therapy in the form of clinician-led group therapy can be useful for supporting your child to meet others with similar needs. This can help them to learn social skills and build relationships with others.

Early intervention is key in the management of ODD. As with parenting any child, it is advised that you build trusted relationships and strong and stable routines at home, give your child clear boundaries and expectations and provide consistent responses to their behaviour.

What can I do to support my child?

Parenting a child with oppositional defiant disorder can be tough. It can be difficult to maintain both your own and your child's wellbeing. Below are some ideas that you can use to support your child.



The first step to supporting your child is to help them regulate their emotions using **coregulation**. This strategy helps both you and your child to find a state of calm together.

Children with ODD often use their behaviour as a way of gaining a reaction. In turn, reacting strongly to their behaviour can then add further 'fuel to the fire'. Try to remain **calm** and react by stating facts, rather than raising your voice or asking your child to explain themselves. This also helps your child to see positive behaviours modelled.

Set and maintain clear and consistent **boundaries**. A child with ODD will defy rules, but that doesn't mean that there shouldn't be any. Set clear rules with high expectations for your household with logical or natural consequences.

Be **predictable**. The more predictable your routine, your reactions and your expectations are, the safer and more stable your child will feel.

Praise your child's positive behaviour regularly and loudly. Try to be specific, for example, avoid saying "Your behaviour was good today" and instead focus on exactly what was good about it, for example, "I really liked it when you helped to tidy up your toys today".

Look after yourself. Whether that be by picking your battles wisely or by taking a moment of peace for yourself, it's important that you take care of your own wellbeing and mental health.



Frequently Asked Questions

At what age is oppositional defiant disorder usually diagnosed?

While symptoms of ODD can often be spotted in early childhood, official diagnosis does not usually occur until children are in primary school. Very occasionally, symptoms do not present themselves until adolescence.

How can I get my child an oppositional defiant disorder diagnosis?

Your first port of call should be your child's GP. In order to qualify for a diagnosis, certain criteria must be met. It can be helpful if you can go with a diary or list of the things that have been happening.

What is the difference between oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder?

Conduct disorder is seen as more severe than ODD. It shares many similar characteristics with ODD, such as a disregard for rules and frequent angry outbursts. However, children with conduct disorder show increased aggressive and violent behaviours, such as damaging property, initiating physical fights or hurting animals. Children with conduct disorder struggle with empathy and often seek to control others.

What is the difference between oppositional defiant disorder and Pathological Demand Avoidance?

Pathological Demand Avoidance, also known as PDA, is generally regarded as a characteristic of Autism. The behaviours themselves are very similar to ODD but the cause is rooted in anxiety rather than anger.

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of current professional research. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. The information given here is intended for general guidance purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation.

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