

How to Help Children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder

“Caring for Children’s Mental Health Parent Education Series

Education Bureau 2022

What is “Oppositional Defiant Disorder” (ODD)?

ODD is a common mental health disorder in children. If your child often argues with you or other authorities (such as seniors and teachers), and continue to show an attitude of anger, irritability, contempt or retaliation, and these performances cause trouble to themselves or the people around them, it may be a sign of ODD. Some people with ODD may also be suffering from Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), Depression or Anxiety Disorders.

Common symptoms of ODD include:

- Refusing to obey instructions or rules
- Arguing a lot with adults
- Often deliberately upsetting others
- Having frequent temper tantrums
- Being easily annoyed by others
- Putting blame on others
- Holding on to anger against something resentful
- Often having a revengeful attitude

Role of Parents

If I suspect that my child has ODD, I should...

- Seek psychiatric consultation and assessment for my child as early as possible, so that appropriate treatment and support training can be arranged for him/her
- Initiate contact with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), class teacher, the School Guidance Team or school social workers for arrangement of appropriate support services

After my child has been assessed as having ODD. I should...

- Cooperate with healthcare or related professionals in undertaking the suggested treatment plan to make sure that my child receives the treatments he/she needs and takes medication as prescribed (if applicable)
- Take the initiative to provide the school with the information about my child’s special educational needs as early as possible, including passing his/her psychiatric report to the school for arrangement of appropriate support services
- Maintain communication with the School Guidance Team or school social workers, SENCO, Student Support Team, class teacher and subject teachers to understand my child’s learning and adjustment condition; and jointly discuss appropriate support strategies if necessary

The following strategies may be considered when supporting your child:

Managing and Improving Behaviour

- Stay calm and avoid arguments. If your child refuses to obey and tries to argue, stabilise your emotions first and only give brief instructions or responses. Excessive contention will not help improve his/her behaviour
- Deal with emotions before behaviours. When your child loses his/her temper or is angry, you may first verbally reflect his/her emotions, such as “I see that you are angry”. After giving appropriate space and time for your child to calm down, you may give clear behaviour expectations in a firm and peaceful manner
- Impose consequences on behaviour and let your child take responsibility for his/her behaviour. The consequences should be reasonable and implemented consistently to prevent your child from escaping through loopholes. Note that punishment is not a lasting and effective strategy, and you should avoid focusing on these punitive approaches in managing your child’s behaviour
- Try to understand the reasons behind misbehaviours so that the real needs of your child could be addressed. This will help avoid the repetitive occurrence of your child’s negative behaviours
- Teach your child according to his/her ability and make good use of rewards. Set reasonable expectations and goals for your child according to his/her ability and condition. Set up a reward mechanism accordingly to encourage your child to replace problem behaviours with positive and good behaviours. You should appreciate and praise your child when he/she has made progress. When necessary, additional rewards may be offered to increase your child’s motivation to improve his/her behaviour. More attention may be paid to what your child likes, which could serve as an incentive for improving his /her behaviour

Preventing Problem Behaviours

- Set clear rules. Set brief and clear rules in advance, and post relevant instructions at a prominent place
- Tell your child in advance what you will do if he/she breaks the rules. If you anticipate that your child may have problematic behaviours on specific occasions, it is advisable that you teach them the appropriate coping methods and consequences in advance, so that he/she can pay more attention to his/her own behaviours
- Teach your child appropriate problem-solving methods. Discuss and analyse with your child different coping strategies for

negative daily encounters that he/she may face to avoid habitual opposition or retaliation

Improving Parent-Child Relationship

- Set aside a period of time (e.g., 15 minutes) every day to engage in relaxing tasks with your child. During the process, avoid giving instructions, scolding or correcting behaviours so as to build trust and enhance parent-child relationship
- Help your child build a positive self-image. Appreciate the positive traits of your child, and enhance his/her self-esteem. It helps to promote parent-child relationship, and make your child more cooperative and compliant

Support Measures and Strategies

In general, schools may provide the following support according to the needs of individual students:

Helping the Student on School Adjustment

- School personnel (such as teachers, social workers and counsellors) should guide the student to improve his/her behaviour in a positive, clear and consistent manner
- Give the student space and time to adjust his/her emotions when necessary
- Analyse the purpose or needs behind the student's different emotion expressions (such as losing temper, resisting to follow instructions), and give appropriate guidance
- Provide group training or individual counselling for the student in need to improve his/her communication, emotion management and problem-solving skills
- Regularly review and record the student's behaviour, give constructive feedback, and formulate reward plans to encourage the student to establish good behaviour habits
- Recognise the student's progress and good behaviours

Helping the Student Get Along and Communicate with Teachers and peers

- Learn about the student's interests or accompany the student in relevant activities, so as to establish a good teacher-student relationship and help improve the student's behaviour
- Arrange the student to participate in group activities, guide the student to reflect on how his/her thoughts about different situations lead to subsequent behaviours, and help him/her build a harmonious and friendly relationships with teachers and peers
- Help the student analyse others' intentions more accurately to reduce his/her oppositional behaviour when interacting with others
- Teach the student social skills directly, create opportunities for the student to practice and apply the skills he/she have learned, and help him/her build and maintain relationships with others

Engaging the Student in Learning Activities

- Tell the student the flow of the lesson and learning activities in advance, clearly explain the class rules, and let the student understand the behaviour expectations in class
- Add elements that can arouse the student's interest in classroom activities, and make use of reward plans to enhance the student's participation in class
- Add opportunities for the student to make choices in learning activities, which can help to enhance the student's sense of control and reduce his/her oppositional behaviours
- Adjust learning demands according to the student's abilities and provide support when necessary to make the student feel capable of learning
- Provide homework accommodations according to the student's needs to improve his/her learning motivation
- Provide special examination arrangements according to the student's needs and suggestions from professionals

Strengthening Support and Home-School Cooperation

- Provide intensive support services to students with serious difficulties as needed, such as formulating an Individual Learning Plan, conducting regular reviews and follow-up
- Hold case conference according to the student's condition to formulate the direction of handling the case. Help the parents understand the school's handling methods. At the same time, support parents to deal with family difficulties or refer the family to appropriate services
- Maintain close collaboration and communication among the school, parents and professionals (such as healthcare professionals, social workers, psychologists, etc.)

Useful Websites

Education Bureau

Homepage of the Education Bureau

<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html>

“SENSE” Integrated Education and Special Education Information Online Information

<https://sense.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html>

“Mental Health @School” Student Mental Health Information Online

<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html>

Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education

https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/integrated-education/download-area-and-related-links/ie_guide_en.pdf

Teacher's Resource Handbook on Understanding and Supporting Students
with Mental Illness

[https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/types-of-special-educational-needs/mental-illness/Teacher's_Resource_Handbook_on_Understanding_and_Supporting_Students_with_Mental_Illness_\(August%202017\).pdf](https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/types-of-special-educational-needs/mental-illness/Teacher's_Resource_Handbook_on_Understanding_and_Supporting_Students_with_Mental_Illness_(August%202017).pdf)

Department of Health

Child Assessment Service

<https://www.dhcas.gov.hk/en/>

Student Health Service

<https://www.studenthealth.gov.hk/eindex.html>

Social Welfare Department

<https://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/>

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

<https://www.hkcss.org.hk/?lang=en>

Telephone Numbers for Enquiry

Education Bureau

General enquiries about special education 3698 3957

Hospital Authority

Hospital Authority Mental Health Direct (24 hours) 2466 7350

Department of Health

Child Assessment Service 2246 6659

Student Health Service 2349 4212

Community Resources and Helplines

<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/en/early-identification-at-the-selective-level/helplines-and-community-resources.html>