

Behavioural Issues: Information for Teachers

Students in today's classrooms are exhibiting emotional and behavioural difficulties that are far more numerous and intensive than in previous years, with a significant amount of the entire student population said to have a behavioural and/or emotional disorder at any one time. The most common disruptive behavioural disorders found in the classroom include oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), conduct disorder (CD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Determining whether a student has a behavioural disorder and the exact nature of this issue can be difficult. However, teachers can look out for a number of warning signs in the classroom that may indicate the presence of a behavioural disorder.



Signs of Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

Oppositional defiant disorder is a behavioural problem that normally manifests in primary school age children. It is characterised by a recurrent pattern of negativistic, hostile, and defiant behaviour toward parents and other authority figures, and seriously interferes with the child's day to day normal functioning.

- Often loses their temper
- Often argues with the teacher
- Often actively defies or refuses to comply with the teacher's requests
- Often deliberately annoys other students
- Often blames others for his or her mistakes or poor behaviour
- Often becomes touchy or is easily annoyed
- Often appears angry or resentful

Signs of Conduct Disorder (CD)

Conduct disorder is a type of behavioural disorder characterised by disruptive or violent behaviour, and a disregard for rules. Whilst it is common, and even normal, for children to exhibit disruptive behaviour, a diagnosis of conduct disorder is warranted when the behaviour is long lasting, violates the rights of others, is against accepted norms, and disrupts the everyday life of the family and/or child.

- Often displays aggressive behaviour that has the potential to cause physical harm to others
- Often engages in bullying or fighting
- Often engages in intentionally destructive behaviour of property
- Often displays deceitful behaviour such as lying
- Often violates the rules

Signs of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a condition that first emerges in childhood, and may continue into adolescence and adulthood. It is characterised by inattention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity.

- Often has difficulty sustaining attention in play activities or tasks and becomes easily distracted.

- ❑ Often has trouble completing their schoolwork and avoids or dislikes tasks that require sustained mental effort
- ❑ Often seems to be on the go (fidgeting and squirming or leaving their seat frequently).
- ❑ Often climbs and runs excessively when it is not appropriate.
- ❑ Often has difficulty waiting for their turn in games or groups situations.
- ❑ Often yells out the answer to questions before they have been completed, and interrupts others.
- ❑ Often appears not to be listening when others are speaking to them.



Strategies for Dealing with Behavioural Disorders in the Classroom:

- Establish clear classroom rules and consistent behavior expectations. Be clear about what is non-negotiable.
- Provide consistency, structure, and clear consequences for the student's behaviour that the student is aware of prior to their implementation. Making a contract with the student in regards to expectations and consequences is helpful so that if the child breaks the rules they know exactly what consequences are expected. This way you can discuss 'bad choices' with the child opposed to punishment as the child will have to accept responsibility for the consequences.
- Apply established consequences immediately, fairly and consistently.
- Avoid power struggles and state your position clearly and concisely when communicating with the student.
- Discuss strategies that the student may use to calm themselves when they feel their anger escalating. Allow the student an opportunity to back away from the situation should they feel they are beginning to lose control.
- Help support social skill development, anger management, conflict resolution, and appropriate assertiveness. This may be able to be provided by the school counsellor.
- Provide a 'cooling down' area/time out where a student can go when they feel they are losing control.
- Communicate with parents so that strategies are consistent at home and school.
- Referral to the school counselor or an external counselor may be appropriate.

Referring Your Students for Treatment & Diagnosis

When it comes to behavioural disorders, the earlier the intervention, the better the outcome is likely to be. Children with mild oppositional behaviour can escalate into more severe conduct disorder when they reach adolescence and this may place the child at risk of expulsions or even problems with the law. Sometimes parents can be in denial as to the extent of their child's behaviour. Therefore it is important for teachers to be aware of behavioural disorders and to consult the school counsellor where necessary.