

# 4 Tips for Teaching Students With ODD

Advice for managing a challenging diagnosis from teachers who've been there.

Oppositional defiant disorder, otherwise known as ODD, is a condition in which children regularly demonstrate anger, opposition and defiance, especially toward those in authority.

It can be a challenging issue to manage in the classroom, and recently in our [WeAreTeachers HELPLINE group](#), teacher Whitney N. asked for tips on working with students who are diagnosed with this disorder.

Here's what our experienced teachers had to say:

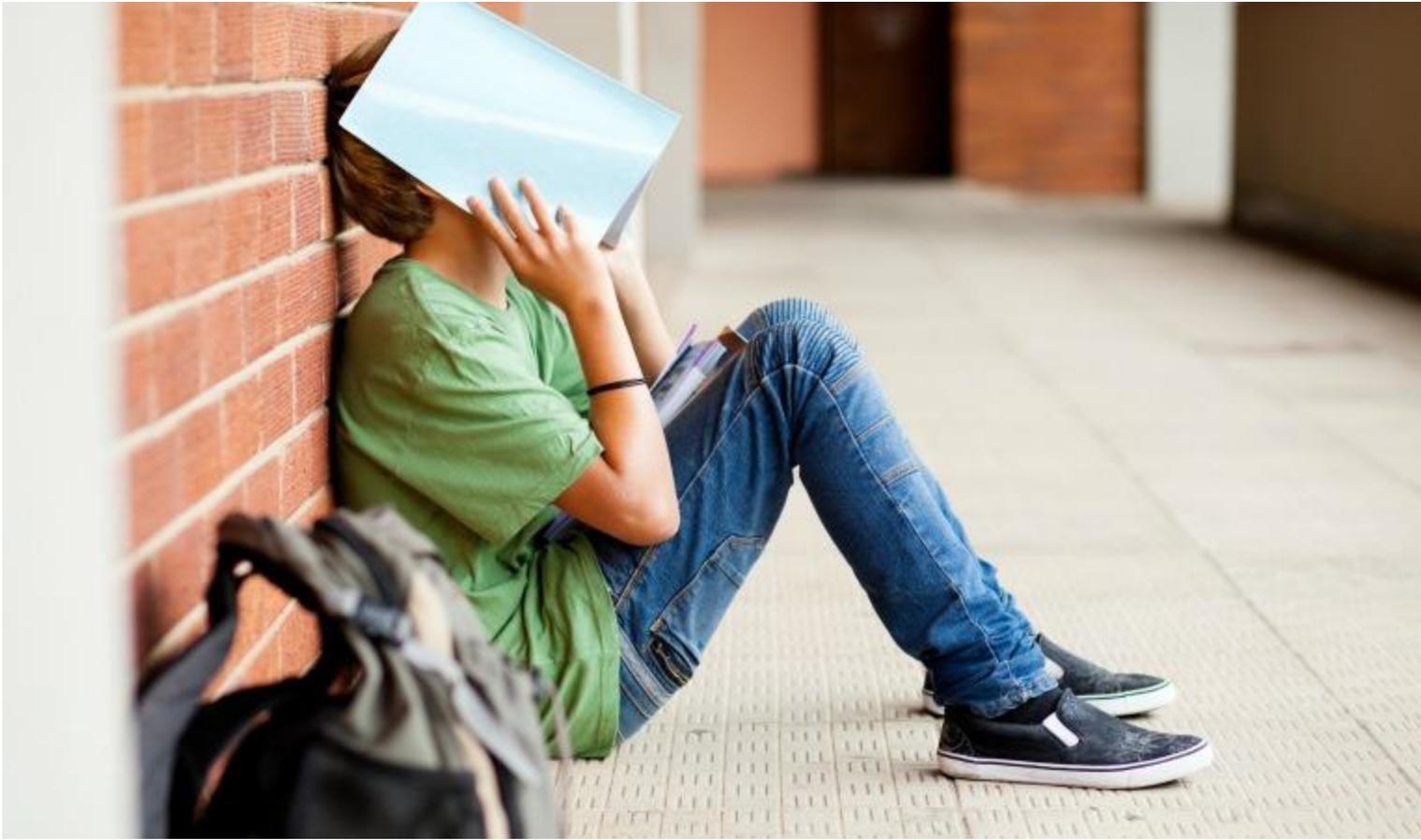
## 1. Avoid Power Struggles

Most of our teachers agreed: Stay out of those winless power struggles. As Kris W. said, **"Pick your battles. A student of mine corrects me all the time, whether I am wrong or not. I answer back, 'OK, let's double-check that.'** If I made a mistake, I correct it and we move on; **if he's wrong, I silently let him to figure it out."**

Often children with ODD need a safe space to go for a five-minute break when they notice themselves getting overwhelmed and ready to challenge.

**"Put out books, coloring, LEGO bricks, etc., in a place where they can go on their own when they feel like they need a break,"** says Tobey G. **"Often immediately after activities with a lot of stimulation, these kids need a safe space to calm down. Let them decide if and when they need to excuse themselves."**

In these situations, consistency is key. **"Instead of arguing, repeat your words and consequences,"** says Brandy T. **"I use trigger words that I often repeat so the student knows I mean business. If a student tries to argue, I simply say either 'not now,' 'later' or 'fix the issue!' The student then knows they can go to their 'chill out' space if they need to calm down."**



## 2. Give Choices

“Always give choices,” advises Holli A. “State your choices—then walk away. Give the student time to process and decide which choice to make. If they don’t like the choices, don’t engage. If they try to argue, repeat the choices and walk away again. If the student still will not choose, they do not get to participate in their preferred activity.”

As in other situations, it pays to stay consistent in your classroom rules **and discipline**. “After I give choices, I always reinforce the classroom rules and procedures and follow up with an appropriate consequence,” says Kristel R. “You cannot falter; stick to your rules and follow through.”



### **3. Offer Appropriate Rewards**

When using a reward system, make sure that it is appropriate and isn't perceived as manipulation. Leslie L. uses a behavior tracking system and a reward system where students can turn it in for an incentive (iPad time, lunch with a teacher, etc.). "I also build breaks right into their schedule," adds Leslie. "And I try to be as patient and understanding as I possibly can."

Teacher Erica M. uses a mentor system. "I have them put in charge of younger kids if possible," says Erica. She uses a point system checklist with options A & B. If they do each one, they earn "points" for an incentive, which often is iPad time during the last 15 minutes of class. "Find an interest and use that to your advantage!" Erica says.



#### **4. Get to Know Them on a Personal Level**

Often kids with ODD are looking for a relationship with a teacher who can help them deal with problems on their own instead of making them stand out in a negative way. Building a connection with them will help get to the root of the behavior.

“Almost all of my students have ODD, and I have a great relationship with most of them,” says Kendra J. “Find out what they are interested in and have conversations on their level during breaks.” Allow them to set goals and decide together what the consequences will be if they don’t meet the goal.

Carol H. says, “Find something at the student’s interest level. I once had a middle school girl that hated all of her teachers and was out of control. She would curse at adults and peers, scratch, bite and refuse to complete work. I found out she played soccer for a travel team. So did my son. A few weeks into the school year, she had a game adjacent to my son’s and I was able to watch her play. It changed everything. She is a freshman in college now and we still keep in touch.”

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