Understanding Oppositional Children

Target group: K-6 educators

Objectives:

Educators will

* Know what ODD looks like
* Know what does not work with children with ODD and will have several ideas for what may work
* Know how to create a safe and realistic exit plan

Materials:

* Handouts from the book Educating Oppositional and Defiant Children by Philip S. Hall and Nancy D. Hall
* Puzzle or something as an example for a cue for exit plan

Anticipatory Set:

Share an experience of a child displaying oppositional behavior or share the following story and then ask educators to write down how they would handle the situation.

From Educating Oppositional and Defiant Children by Philip S. Hall and Nancy D. Hall, p. 1:

“Justin, “ the teacher directed, “stop playing with your crayon and get back to work.” Without even giving the teacher a glance, Justin rolled his crayon down his desk and squealed in delight as it fell to the floor.

Noticing the teacher’s exasperation, the classroom aide, Mrs. Johnson, put her hand out and pleaded, “Justin, won’t you please give me your crayon?” Justin threw the crayon at Mrs. Johnson, striking her in the forehead.

If your ideas of how to handle Justin’s behavior had anything to do with punishment, rewards or ignoring, you will be at the drawing board for a long time because they do not work on impulse behavior.

Lesson:

What it looks like:

Children with ODD “do not listen to directives from adults; they are openly defiant; and, if pushed, they are apt to become aggressive.” Many of these children will turn to bullying when they lack the social skills to make friends. They may have trouble reading the subtle social cues to build relationships and will reject others before they can reject them. They may also have trouble predicting the course of events. They may not respond positively to praise.

What you can do:

“…Arrange the environment so that it is difficult for the child to do the wrong thing and the easiest thing for the child to do is the right thing.”

Look at handout figure 3.1 page 32

Minimize distractions

Use a daily schedule appropriate for developmental level

* Object schedules – use objects symbolizing what time it is (i.e. spoon means lunch) and have a schedule shelf in order for student to refer to when teacher hands him a check mark signifying to check the schedule and get in the correct place
* Pic Symbol schedule – use line drawings on a card the child carries with him to remind him of where to be. Teacher may ask , “Where do you need to be right now?” Rather than give a verbal directive of “Sit down and do your math.”
* Written words – schedule may be taped to a desk with only a quarter of the day showing at a time.

Work Structure

It may be helpful to remove all distractions from desk area and have “activity boxes” with the appropriate materials for the subject appropriate at that time. If used it is important that it is clear a) what work needs to be done b) how much work needs to be done c) when the work is finished and d) what comes next

Tasks

Independent work should be limited but when necessary it should be at the child’s developmental or academic level, have good visual clarity, a clear finish, only one response set per page and have extraneous writing and pictures removed.

Assistance

When possible an aide can help remove distractions, modify tasks to student’s ability, make changes if necessary for visual clarity and define what finished means if it is not clear. Specialists may be needed for learning or socialization needs.

Antecedents to Avoid (pass out handout from p. 59)

The following are some common events that occur right before a typical oppositional or defiant behavior occurs but each child may have antecedents unique to them so taking note of them or better yet having someone observe them so you are aware of the antecedents, will help prevent the behavior.

* Hearing someone say “No!”
* Hearing a directive to stop doing something
* Hearing a sharply worded directive to do something
* Seeing any gesture, facial grimace, or body language that conveys disapproval
* Having idle time
* Praise before trust is built

Antecedents to Enhance

* Choices
* Foreshadowing

Removing the child from class

This becomes “necessary when they display behavior that could hurt people, damage property, or seriously disrupt the teaching and learning environment.” It is also necessary to have a plan that won’t escalate the problem.

When a school psychologist is not available, the teacher may ask the child what kinds of things cannot be permitted in the classroom and then what should happen if he does those things. Together they can identify what is not appropriate and make sure the child understands removal from the classroom is not punishment but for the safety of others, himself or property.

Choose a quiet place where the student can calm down and return to class when he is under control. They suggest asking the student what activity they would like to do when out of the classroom – could be a puzzle or (music game) or work that can be done independently. If the child starts to get upset, the teacher or aide can hand him a puzzle piece and the aide will go with the child. Hopefully the child will recognize when they are staring to lose control and can take the puzzle piece on their own. Talking about it this way with the student gives them the feeling of having some control.

Role-play before the exit plan is needed is important! Building a relationship with the child and having the plan written up and signed by the student and shown to several people will help with commitment. Continued discussion and tweaking may be needed.

Suggestions for educators

In the heat of the moment, it is imperative that the educator stay calm. Body language must be neutral and it’s best to not use language. Body positioning can be used to guide student in the direction you want him to go.

If the plan fails, blame the plan and work with the student to make a better plan.

In Closing:

Whether or not the student has been diagnosed with ODD, these nonverbal communications, classroom set up, work structure and task simplifications and giving students choices and foreshadowing are all useful tools for all students or any student who may be showing some signs of defiance or aggression, such as, a student with ADHD to name just one of many similar. I think if we can put aside wanting to punish and realize that in order to change behavior and keep a safe environment we must change the way we interact with these students, we will have success in limiting classroom disruptions and in keeping a safer environment for all students.