

INDEX for both RED and BLUE books

This book is a Companion Guide to the earlier book "The Teacher Assistants Big RED Book of Ideas."

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is ODD or Oppositional Defiant Disorder?

A: Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) is described by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) as an ongoing pattern of disobedient, hostile and defiant behaviour toward authority figures which goes beyond the bounds of normal childhood behaviour. People who have it may appear very stubborn. Temper tantrums, stealing, bullying, and vandalism are some of key symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder. ODD children may present as negative, defiant, unable to take "no" for an answer, deliberately annoying others, easily annoyed themselves, or blaming others for all that goes wrong. The child's behaviour often disrupts the child's normal daily activities, including activities within the family and at school.

No one knows what causes ODD. It is often identified with other diagnosis such as Asperger, ADHD, ODD, OCD, or Tourette's syndrome.

5 Quick Tips for Supporting Students with ODD

1. Choose your battles. As soon as you find yourself in conflict ask "is conflict going to resolve or escalate the situation?"
2. Try distracting them to something else in a very calm voice
3. Try to catch doing LOTS of great things. Even if they sit still for 1 second, tell them "great sitting as soon as they do the right thing!"
4. Let them be your special helper
5. NEVER take what they say personally (yes we know that sometimes what they say is awful- killing, hurting, etc.)

Q: Why does the student still have such messy writing?

A: Writing for children with ASD can be hard work because of two factors:

- Lack of fine motor control and strength.
- Excessive energy and focus that is required.

Anything we can do to improve fine motor control, build strength and reduce the frustration of the child is essential. Children frustrated by lack of control of their pencil will start to avoid writing and start using inappropriate behaviours to 'get out of' doing their work. (See pg 63Dysgraphia) We also recommend pencil grips to support writing available at www.suelarkey.com

Q: Why don't negative consequences work? Why taking privileges away rarely works?

A: We regularly get asked "shouldn't there be a consequence? Surely they need to learn they can't get away with that".

It is very important that you understand and appreciate that these students approach life from a **different perspective** and their motivation is based mainly on their special interest/s.

If you take away a privilege you may actually escalate the behaviour. (See behaviour page 41) For ASD students consequences are only learned from positive reinforcement. Ie more time at their favourite activity. It requires very careful planning, pre-warning, clear expectations, and consistency from EVERYONE.

Q: What is Executive Functioning?

A: Impaired Executive Function can include a difficulty considering alternative problem solving strategies. This can be seen where a student gets stuck on one idea or thought and can't recognise there are other alternative ideas or thoughts. For more information see Tony Attwood 'The Complete Guide to Asperger' pages 234- 236.

Q: What if the student doesn't want you to work with them?

A: This often happens to students who don't like to be pointed out. They may feel like they have someone watching over their shoulder all the time.

Don't take it personally as having someone sit beside them may actually increase their anxiety. It also makes them more vulnerable in the playground as having a teacher aide beside you makes you different from all the other students.

Strategies that will work include:

- Work with other students in the class. Tell the student that if they stay on task you will stay away, if they don't stay on task you will go and sit with them.
- Subtle redirecting is always helpful.

Q: What is Hyperlexia?

A: Hyperlexia is the ability to read well, but comprehension skills do not match reading skills. Many students need support to improve comprehension skills even though they are very proficient readers.

Q: What if the student has constant staff changes?

A: This will happen particularly in secondary school. Part of the answer is to have visuals in place. The more visuals in place the less the student will rely on staff. We recognise that staff changes can cause stress not only to the student but also to the staff. We would recommend using the student profile form page 68 and the summary student profile on page 67.

Q: When do you change the teacher assistant?

A: Traditionally schools change teacher and teacher assistants at the end of each year. We have found that changing the teacher **and** assistant at the same time can be stressful for the student and the family. In many schools their classes are not finalised until week 2. We recommend that the student keeps last year's teacher aide until all classes are settled about 2 to 3 weeks. This ensures a more comprehensive changeover of information strategies and reduces anxiety in the student.

Q: What do you do if chill out time is viewed as a reward by peers?

A: It is very important to address this issue with the class and peers as soon as it appears. WE believe this comes back to having understanding in the classroom. See page 16 Promote understanding in the classroom.

Q: How do we workout appropriate expectations?

A: This is the role of the IEP. It is important that this is a group decision and takes into account limitations of teacher's time, parents' wishes, and student's strengths. The IEP should be constantly reviewed and adapted as the student changes.

Q: Why does this student struggle to complete work on time?

A: This is part of the executive functioning difficulties that many ASD students experience. They normally need support in planning, assignments and topic talks. They will need to be taught specific skills and strategies for planning their time, their workload, knowing how to prioritise, sitting for exams etc. See page 7 & 73 for more on executive functioning.

Q: How do we access funding?

A: Each state has its own formula and rules. Your local Autism Association is normally the best source of up to date information on how to access appropriate funding. It is worthwhile networking with other parents to find out what supports they have been able to access.

Q: The student I work with is always tired. What can I do?

A: Research has found that two thirds of children with an ASD have sleep problems, fragmented sleep and early awakenings. So be aware that many of our students are bad sleepers.

It is worth checking with the parents if there is anything you can do at school.