

Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD)

Similar in presentation to Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) which exists as part of the Autistic presentation, ODD exists in those who aren't Autistic, but still exhibit similar characteristics regarding defiance and demand avoidance.

Oppositional defiance disorder (ODD) is a condition characterised by oppositional behaviour including deliberate and intense attempts to avoid complying with any demands and anger and frustration related to authority, or even just perceived authority from others. ODD can exist for a number of reasons, including:

- Undiagnosed Autism, in which case it's usually PDA that the person lives with but isn't diagnosed Autistic for some reason.
- Trauma-based disorders. Many people who've endured trauma, especially childhood trauma and abuse will have oppositional responses to anyone with real or perceived authority.
- High anxiety. People with high levels of anxiety can appear very demand avoidant and oppositional as a result of anxiety and their need to feel in control of their environment.

Simple strategies to work with someone with ODD include:

- Don't tell them what to do. It will never work and is bound to lead to arguments and escalations in behaviour.
- Provide them validation in the manner they need it and to the extent that they need it. If a person doesn't feel regulated (e.g. Their needs haven't been met), then they are likely to be more demand avoidant and very oppositional.
- Work on building relationships of trust first and foremost. Without trust and regulation, a person cannot have successful and positive friendships or relationships with people.
- Don't focus on 'wins'. This is people's lives, and they deserve respect and dignity of risk. It's never about whether you had a win and they did what you asked.

- If you are working with someone with a Trauma-Based Disorder, make sure you've been trained properly. See our other information sheet on Trauma-Based Disorders to ensure you understand the underpinning needs a person has.
- Always use PDA/ODD scripting. Never be directional. Always use questions.

Other Way's to Say NO & PDA/ODD Scripting

Language: Avoid no, avoid too much change language

There are so many ways to say 'no' without using the word. The word has often been used far too much with people and it's become toxic

Other ways to say "No" include:

- ✓ **Agree:** *"Sure, that's up to you if you want to do that. Perhaps once we finish what we are doing if it suits you better?"*
- ✓ **Offer a choice:** *"Yeah, I understand that you want to do that, but remember you only have enough money for one of those things. Maybe do that, but don't purchase XYZ tomorrow – it's up to you."*
- ✓ **Offer an alternative:** *"Ahh you ate Fish and Chips yesterday with Jack remember, I thought you wanted some chicken and salad today?"*
- ✓ **Distract/Redirect:** *"Holy Dooley, did you see [insert interesting thing] over there?"* Any kind of distraction may get the person out of the zone enough to not be as focused on the thing that they cannot do/have.
- ✓ **What would [insert person they like] do about this?** If a person really likes the views of someone else, even a TV star or actor. You could ask what they might do about the decision.



- ✓ **Enlist help from an authority figure:** *“Let’s ask the doctor next week if that’s a good idea before we do it, just to make sure that we aren’t doing anything silly and making you feel sick or anything.”*
- ✓ **Agree that it’s difficult and sympathise:** *“I know, I hate that we can’t go down that road right now, how stupid that they blocked that off for no damn reason – how annoying, I reckon we tell them what we think next time.”*
- ✓ **Call on imagination:** *“Geez, there’s no traffic, how ridiculous. Imagine if there was a massive convoy of trucks though, how long do you think it would take a convoy of trucks to go down this main street?”*
- ✓ **Remind the person of a previous time that decision wasn’t so good:** *“Well, yeah I suppose you could eat that, but Geez, remember last time you did, and you were so sick we had to take you to hospital for 2 days? Do you really want to risk that again?”*

PDA/ODD Scripting includes finding ways to say things without making them a direction, yet instead, providing them a question which is loaded with natural consequences.

Situation 1: The person is not supposed to spend their money on junk food and has to contribute \$50 to their household bill for food. If they don’t do this their rental agreement could be terminated.

Non-PDA/ODD way to approach this: *“You can’t buy junk food or you’ll be kicked out of your home. No junk food.”*

PDA/ODD way to approach this: *“What do you want to do? If you buy the junk food, what’s your plan for paying the \$50 for your rental agreement for food? If they kick you out, what’s the plan for where you are going to live?”*

Situation 2: The person is not supposed to go into another person’s bedroom while they aren’t home and watch their TV. If they do, the person will yell at them when they get home again.

Non-PDA/ODD way to approach this: *“Don’t go into Jack’s room. You’re not allowed and you’ve been told this.”*

PDA/ODD way to approach this: *“Are you supposed to go in there? Ok, well, it’s your choice. I just need to find something for me to do this afternoon while he yells at you again. Is that all he will do when he gets home, just yell at you? Gosh... I hate it when people yell at me, but anyway – your choice.”*

PDA/ODD scripting is about providing choice and control to the other person and making your comments in the form of questions but reminding the person of the natural consequences which are bound to happen, based on the choice they make. PDA/ODD scripting feels awkward to people as it’s not directional and we are all so used to being directed by others. PDA/ODD scripting isn’t guaranteed to produce compliance and there are times when the person will choose to be happy with the natural consequence anyway. This is life and choice and their dignity of risk. We don’t have the right to force someone to get it right every time and a person with PDA/ODD is likely to test you by making some poor choices and seeing if you take back control.

Help us move the change to non -ABA strategies by adopting brain-based and sensory based integration interventions.
Join FB group “The OTHER Way” to find the community pushing this movement.

[The OTHER way \(public group\) | Facebook](#) *There are no copyright restrictions on this work and you’re welcome to share it.