

# Teaching Students with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

An FAQ for Adaptive Riding Instructors



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## 1. What is Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), and how might it present itself in the riding arena?

ODD is a behavioral disorder often diagnosed in youth and teens, although it can persist into adulthood. It's characterized by patterns of uncooperative, defiant, and even hostile behavior toward authority figures, peers, and family members. Specific behaviors may include:

**Verbal defiance:** Arguing, talking back, blaming others

**Non-compliance:** Refusing to follow instructions or rules

**Vindictive behavior:** Seeking revenge or retribution

**Manipulative tactics:** Trying to control situations or people for their own benefit

**In the riding arena, ODD might manifest as:**

Refusal to follow safety instructions

Arguing with the instructor or volunteers

Deliberately mistreating the horse

Disrupting other riders in the lesson

## 2. How can I effectively set boundaries with a student who has ODD?

**Setting clear, fair boundaries is essential:**

**Define expectations:** Clearly state the rules and acceptable behavior for all students, including specific examples.

**Outline consequences:** Explain the fair and appropriate consequences for breaking the rules (e.g., dismounting and walking the horse for using unkind words).

**Confirm understanding:** Ask the student to repeat the rules and consequences to ensure they understand.

**Consistency is key:** Always follow through with the stated consequences calmly and fairly. Don't make threats you won't enforce.

### 3. How should I communicate with a student with ODD during a lesson?

**Clear and confident communication is vital:**

**Land your sentences:** Speak with authority and avoid ending sentences with an upward inflection that makes them sound like questions open for debate.

**Use direct phrasing:** Instead of saying "Let's trot when you're ready," say "Riders, we are going to trot now."

**Offer controlled choices:** Give the student options within the lesson plan (e.g., "We can practice trotting on the rail or work on the barrel pattern. Which would you like to do first?")

**Re-state and re-direct:** If a student pushes back or refuses the choices, calmly re-state the options and move forward. Avoid getting drawn into arguments or negotiations.

### 4. How can I use praise to encourage positive behavior?

**Specific, honest, and timely praise is powerful:**

**Be specific:** Instead of just saying "Good job," point out the exact behavior you're praising (e.g., "I appreciate how you asked your volunteer for the beanbag so politely").

**Be genuine:** Only praise behavior that is truly deserving. Students can sense when praise is insincere.

**Time it right:** Praise is most effective when given immediately after the desired behavior, especially during moments of defiance or frustration.

### 5. What should I do if a student with ODD says or does something hurtful?

**Remember to stay calm and don't take it personally:**

**Model emotional regulation:** Take a deep breath and calmly address the situation without escalating it. You can even verbalize your feelings (e.g., "I'm feeling frustrated right now, so I'm going to take a few deep breaths.")

**Explain the impact:** Help the student understand why their words or actions were hurtful or inappropriate.

**Enforce consequences:** If necessary, implement the pre-determined consequences for the behavior.

**Debrief later:** After the lesson, find a trusted colleague to discuss the situation while respecting student confidentiality.

### 6. How can I prevent a student with ODD from playing me against other members of the team?

**Open communication and consistency are crucial:**

**Inform your team:** Share relevant information about the student's behavior patterns and any specific challenges with volunteers, parents, and other instructors.

**Reinforce boundaries:** Ensure everyone understands and consistently enforces the established rules and consequences.

**Address manipulation directly:** If a student attempts to manipulate a situation, calmly state the facts and redirect them back to the agreed-upon plan.

## 7. What additional resources are available for instructors working with students with ODD?

**Seek out continuing education and support:**

**Professional development:** Attend workshops and training sessions on working with students with behavioral challenges.

**Online communities:** Join forums or online communities specifically for adaptive or therapeutic riding instructors to share experiences and strategies.

**Mentorship:** Connect with experienced instructors who can provide guidance and support.

## 8. Where can I find more information on teaching riding lessons to students with a variety of needs?

The **Intuitive Instructor Club** offers a wide range of resources specifically designed for adaptive and therapeutic riding instructors, including:

**Over 160 videos** on various topics, taught by advanced and master-level instructors.

**Forums** for connecting with other professionals.

**Downloadable documents and resources.**

Visit [www.hooffallsandfootfalls.com](http://www.hooffallsandfootfalls.com) for more information.