Section 4

Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems
My 11-year-old son, Craig, was suicidal. He set fires. He killed animals. He was a danger to himself and everyone around him. ... The people in the system of care really showed that they care about us as a family. They lifted us up and brought us closer. Today, Craig is on the honor roll at school. All the help from the men and women in the system of care has really paid off.

Taken from Craig’s Story Systems of Care

Students with emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems may have conditions such as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and conduct disorder (CD). Generally a student with emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems will present with negative behaviours that impinge on their learning and often on their social development. (This category is not intended to include students whose conduct or behavioural difficulties can be dealt with in accordance with agreed school procedures on discipline.)
Characteristics and behaviours associated with emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems may include: aggressive or anti-social behaviour; inattentiveness; distractibility and impulsiveness; impaired social interactions; a general inability to cope with the routine of daily tasks; obsessive and repetitive behaviours; attention-seeking behaviours such as negative interactions or a poor attitude towards work, peers or teachers; and depressed behaviours such as withdrawal, anxiety and mood swings. Some students with emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems have negative self-concepts and low self-esteem. In the classroom, students may be frequently off-task and may adversely affect the learning of some others. Students may have problems working in groups and in forming relationships. Students may show aggression towards others or refuse to co-operate.
SECTION 4: Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems

Tips for Learning and Teaching

- Students work best in organised, structured environments in which materials and equipment are neatly arranged and presented in a predictable way.
- Establishing good relationships based on trust is important. Be empathetic.
- Label the behaviour and not the student.
- Tactically ignore secondary behaviour.
- Ensure that the curriculum is at the appropriate level for the ability and interests of the student, one where he/she can experience success.
- Use positive rather than negative statements (e.g. ‘Put your hand up if you want to say something’ rather than ‘no talking’).
- Keep statements that relate to behaviour as clear and simple as possible. Avoid multiple commands.
- Use ‘thanks’ to convey an expectation that a request will be complied with (e.g. ‘Looking this way, thanks’).
- Get the student’s attention first, and then continue with the direction (e.g. ‘Jimmy,’ (pause and wait for acknowledgement) ‘sit down please’).
- Utilise catch phrases that relate to key routines. The following are some examples: ‘Four on the floor’ – to get students to sit properly with all four chair legs on the ground. ‘Hands up if you are listening’ – to bring students back to whole-class listening from group work.
- Carefully select rules and consequences and follow through on them consistently. Rules for classroom behaviour can be generated by discussion with students and then displayed in an easily understood format. Augment class rules with visual cues to assist students who may have additional literacy difficulties.
- Devise an individual behaviour-management plan in consultation with multi-disciplinary support. Ideally, the student should be involved in this.
- Implement effective corrective strategies such as time-out or withdrawal of privileges.
- Provide a structured approach to educational experiences.
- Incorporate an element of choice in lesson activities.
- Seek regular clarification of task requirements from the student and check that the student understands them.
- Create opportunities for the student to exhibit positive behaviour.
- Redirect behaviour to more positive activities.
Explicitly teach social skills and provide opportunities for the students to learn more about their feelings and the feelings of others. Strategies such as role play, class discussion, modelling, cognitive problem solving and Circle Time may be useful in this respect.

Foster a supportive classroom atmosphere in which all students are valued.

Avoid dealing with students in a confrontational manner.

Help students to set targets to improve their behaviour. Provide regular opportunities for students to discuss and evaluate their progress.

Work with colleagues to develop a whole-school behaviour policy, based on the concept of rights and responsibilities, which has clear rules, routines and consequences.

Catch the student being good and reward appropriate behaviour consistently, using praise, points, etc. The following table gives examples of phrases that can be used to praise students; they are also phrases that we can give to students to praise one another.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More than 100 Ways to Say Well Done</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantastic!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrific!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tremendous!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you do that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s better!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m impressed!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your work today was top class!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’ve really turned the corner!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That was a great turn you did!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s great that I can rely on you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You made the right choice there!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really notice your improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s great when it all works out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That was a great performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve never seen anyone do it better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Way to go!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superb!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re getting better every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonderful!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 4: Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems

That’s quite an improvement
Marvellous!
Now you’ve figured it out!
Perfect!
That’s a fine job you’ve done there!
You’re in top gear today!
That’s it!
You figured it out very quickly
You remembered!
You’re really improving!
I think you’ve got it now
Outstanding work!
I like that!
Couldn’t have done it better myself
Now that’s what I call a fine job
You did that very well
Congratulations
That was first class work!
Right on!
Sensational!
That’s the best ever!
Good remembering!
You haven’t missed a thing!
Congratulations! You’ve done it!
You must have been practising
Good one!
It’s a step in the right direction!
You’re right on track now!
You’re doing a great job there!
You did loads of work today
That’s right!
Now you’ve the hang of it

That’s the way
Great stuff – here’s your reward
Now you have it!
Great co-operation guys/girls!
You’re a super team!
That’s coming along nicely
Excellent!
That’s good work!
You’re making such progress!
That’s the best you’ve ever done!
Good going!
Keep it up!
That’s really nice!
Wow!
Keep up the good work!
Much better!
Good for you!
Good thinking!
Exactly right!
Super!
Nice going
You make it look so easy
An-mhaith!
Bhí sé sin go h-íontach!
Ar fheabhas!
Tá an obair sin an-deas!
Maith an cailín/buachaill
Tá gach rud ceart agat
Tá an obair seo go h-álainn
Maith thú
Tá mé an-sásta leis an obair seo
Comhghairdeachas!
SECTION 4: Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems

Additional Resources/References


5. National Council for Technology in Education (NCTE) has suggestions on utilising Information and Communication Technology with students with emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems, website: [http://www.ncte.ie/](http://www.ncte.ie/)


11. Special Education Support Service (SESS) lists external websites related to emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems and behaviour management, website: [http://www.sess.ie/](http://www.sess.ie/)
SECTION 4: Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

They were sympathetic that some things were difficult for Josh. They understood that he wasn’t being purposefully lazy or disrespectful, but they still held high expectations for him.

Joni Poff, mother of a student with ADHD, on his teachers. In an article by Jean Crockett in Daniel P. Halligan and James M. Kauffman, Exceptional Learners (9th edn), Allyn & Bacon Publishers: Boston, MA (2003)

The behaviour of students with ADHD is characterised by poor sustained attention, impaired impulse control, an inability to delay gratification and excessive task-irrelevant activity. Students may often fidget with their hands or feet, appear restless, leave their seat in the classroom or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected, may run about or climb excessively in situations where it is inappropriate, have difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly and may often talk excessively.

Students with ADHD find it difficult to plan and control their behaviour. They often seem unaware of danger and have a tendency to rush into things. They also find listening to, remembering and following through on instructions difficult and fail to finish school work. Students are often reluctant to engage in activities that require prolonged effort, are easily distracted by extraneous stimuli and often have difficulty organising materials required for participating in learning tasks. Students with ADHD have difficulty with sustained play and are often disliked by their peers because of their aggression, impulsiveness and inability to take responsibility for their actions.

The incidence of symptoms tends to decline in adolescence and adulthood but the disorder persists. Students with ADHD are often on medical treatment to mitigate the impact of the disorder on their daily lives.
Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

ADD is described as ADHD without the hyperactivity and is characterised by excessive daydreaming, frequent staring, cognitive sluggishness, lethargy, confusion, memory problems and social reticence. Students often blurt out answers before questions have been completed, have problems waiting for their turn and may frequently and unwittingly interrupt or intrude on others.

Tips for Learning and Teaching

- Facilitate easy transitions between lessons. Consider the use of a clear signal to mark the end of one activity and the beginning of another.
- Encourage and promote support for the student from peers.
- Enforce classroom rules consistently.
Pre-establish consequences for misbehaviours.

Provide regular, consistent and constructive feedback to the student. Reward more than you punish. Immediately praise any good behaviour or accomplishment.

React to inappropriate behaviour by suggesting a positive alternative.

Ignore minor inappropriate behaviour.

To ensure as far as possible that the student is rewarded more often than he/she is reprimanded, use rewards in preference to sanctions.

Set targets as a positive option for the student. See the completion of these targets as an opportunity to give a reward.

Use concrete materials and computer-assisted instruction.

Structure teaching carefully and present new material in a step by step manner.

Ensure you have student’s attention prior to issuing instructions.

When directing a question towards the student make sure you say his/her name first as a signal for the student to pay attention.

Have the students keep their desk and immediate environment clear of distractions and put away items that are not in use.

Seat the student at the front with his/her back to the rest of the class.

Seat among well-focused peers, preferably those whom the student views as significant peers.

Try not to have the student seated near distracting stimuli such as doors, windows, high traffic areas, etc.

Avoid multiple instructions and complex directions, keeping instructions simple and as near to the one-sentence rule as possible. Be consistent with daily instructions.

Assign only one task at a time to the student.

Give extra time for certain tasks as often students may work slowly.

Use teacher-modelling and direct instruction in order to demonstrate effective ways of completing a task.

Use a variety of learning and teaching resources that are motivating for the student.

Interact with the student in a calm manner.
Ensure classroom routines are predictable.

- Provide advance warning that something is about to happen/finish as these students can experience difficulties at transition periods.
- Present uncluttered text in worksheets.
- Utilise checklists for the student to work through when doing tasks and homework.
- Encourage the student to verbalise to the teacher what needs to be done and then reiterate the same silently to himself/herself.
- Directly teach concentration skills, the following of rules, self-management and organisational skills.
- Consider allowing the student to wear earphones when completing tasks if this is found to promote greater levels of task-engagement. Perhaps permit the student to choose the music he/she wishes to listen to while wearing earphones.

### Additional Resources/References

1. Adders.org lists ADHD support groups in Ireland, website: http://www.adders.org/irelandmap.htm
3. Attention Deficit Disorder Association (ADDA) (US), website: http://www.add.org/
6. HADD (Hyperactive Attention Deficit Disorder Family Support Group), website: http://www.hadd.ie/
Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

Oppositional Defiant Disorder is, in my book, a red flag. It is an indication that there is something else going on. I have never... seen a kid that meets criteria for ODD and did not meet criteria for some other diagnosis. It is as if the oppositional and defiant behavior is a coping strategy for dealing with other issues. Or a poorly functional reaction to other issues that are NOT being dealt with.

ODD is a psychiatric disorder, the definite causes of which are unknown, although biological and environmental factors may have a role to play. The hallmark of ODD is a recurrent pattern of negative, defiant, disobedient and hostile behaviour towards authoritative figures in particular that continues for at least six months, during which four or more of the following are present:

- often loses temper
- often argues with adults
- often actively defies/refuses to comply with adults’ requests or rules
- often deliberately annoys people
- often puts the blame for own mistakes or behaviour on others
- often is easily upset or annoyed by others
- often is angry and resentful
- often is spiteful and vindictive

The disturbance in behaviour causes clinically significant impairment in social, academic and/or occupational functioning. Students with ODD possess a ‘counter-will’: the more pressure one applies the greater the opposition. Actions are premeditated and often the student may want confrontation. Typically, in the school situation the student with ODD will be aggressive and will purposefully bother and irritate others.

It is exceptionally rare for a student to present with ODD alone: usually students have other neuropsychiatric disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, conduct disorder (CD) and bipolar disorder. Students may also present with Tourette syndrome or other special educational needs.
SECTION 4: Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems

Tips for Learning and Teaching

- It is important to empathise with the student and understand that you are not the cause of defiance, but rather, its outlet.
- Allow students to help others in their areas of strength.
- Develop a self-esteem programme and explicitly teach social skills.
- Seat student near a good role model.
- Identify skills or attributes that you can positively reinforce.
- Remain positive; give praise and positive reinforcement when the student demonstrates flexibility and/or co-operation.
- Be approachable and act as a positive role model.
- Develop classroom rules and a daily schedule so the student knows what to expect. Use visual cues to assist students who may have literacy difficulties. Prioritising rules for the student is also useful.
- Consistency of application of agreed rules by all stakeholders in the school is needed with students with ODD. Rules need to be realistic, specific, consistent and proactive.
- Differentiate teaching to meet identified needs.
- Adopt a structured approach to teaching learning and behaviour targets.
- Be aware that structure is required throughout the school day, including during non-structured periods such as break times.
- Programmes that deal with anger management and foster emotional intelligence can be effective for these students.
- Work in partnership with parents and/or carers.
- Put a reward system in place where the student values the outcome.
- Set targets for behaviour and learning that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and within a timescale (SMART).
- Create workstations where the students can listen to their choice of music and work independently. Use earphones with controlled volume to avoid disruption to other students.
SECTION 4: Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems

- Consider peer mentoring with other students.
- Have an optional exit strategy in place for the student (e.g. student has a red card).
- Build relationships with other students through Circle Time activities, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), drama and role play.
- Remember rewards work better than sanctions for these students.
- Implement a behaviour contract with the student and ask for the student’s suggestions on ways to improve behaviour.
- Minimise distractions.
- Minimise transitions and where transitions are necessary ensure they are clearly signalled. Consider the use of a song, a sound, a gesture or an object.
- Identify what triggers the student’s behaviour: look at the antecedents (what happened before the problem behaviour), the behaviour, and the consequences of the behaviour. This is referred to as the ABC approach to managing behaviour.
- Give the student additional responsibilities. Allow the student to get used to carrying out small and reasonable requests.
- Provide the student with a choice of outcome where possible as it can help to avoid tension and negativity (e.g. if a student is using a mobile phone in class the teacher may offer a choice of outcome to the infringement of a rule by asking the student to either put the phone away or leave it on the teacher’s desk until the end of class). This appears less confrontational to the student.
- Reward the student after short periods of success.
- Reward student effort as much as achievement.
- Break tasks into small manageable chunks.
- Agree methods by which the student can engage your attention.
Allocate clear roles to all members during group work.

Focus on the incident not the student and focus on as few behaviours as possible – perhaps even one – at a time. Decide what behaviour you will ignore and what you will not accept. Communicate clearly the consequences for the behaviours you will not accept.

Avoid raising your voice or exhibiting any emotion. Be neutral and speak calmly, saying something similar to ‘As you broke this rule this is what you will have to do’. Be like a referee, who simply states the consequence and holds the player accountable.

Do not allow the student an opportunity to argue.

For students who have difficulties with change consider the use of a visual timetable. This may have sequential pictures/photographs of the activities/lessons for the day. Examples of visual timetables are presented below.
Additional Resources/References


5. Special Education Support Service (SESS) lists external websites related to emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems and behaviour management, website: http://www.sess.ie/

SECTION 4: Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems

Conduct Disorder (CD)

The key, for the teacher as well as for the student, is hard work. When hard work is combined with love, humor and a recognition of ... the desire to learn, the ability to sacrifice, the wish to get ahead that burns in our young people, the stereotypes and the barriers begin to crumble.

Jaime Escalante

(In 1974, [he] was hired as a basic Mathematics teacher at Garfield High School, a troubled inner-city school in East Los Angeles. He attracted national attention with his spectacular success teaching advanced Mathematics to gang members and other students who had been considered 'unteachable'.)


CD may at first present as what one may believe to be oppositional defiant disorder (ODD); however, it is more severe and has more socially disruptive and disturbing characteristics. While students with CD may share characteristics similar to the students with ODD they are more physically aggressive and threatening, and appear to lack empathy. Behaviour in which the rights of others or age-appropriate societal norms are violated is persistent and repetitive. CD is one of the most disruptive and difficult conditions to affect the behaviour of students and those with CD have great difficulty following rules and behaving in a socially acceptable way. Typically, CD is not diagnosed until the student is at post-primary level.

Those with CD may be aggressive to people and/or animals and this may be exhibited when the student bullies threatens or intimidates others, initiates physical fights, uses a dangerous weapon, is physically cruel to people and/or animals, steals while confronting others (e.g. mugging, purse snatching, extortion) and/or forces someone into sexual activity. Students with CD may deliberately set fires and destroy property. Deceitfulness, lying and/or stealing also characterise the student with CD and may present when a student breaks into a house/car, lies and engages in stealing activities such as shoplifting. Serious violation of rules may also be associated with CD and may include truancy from school.

It is exceptionally rare for a student to present with CD alone. The student may have some other neuropsychiatric disorder such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression or bipolar disorder. Students with CD may also have Tourette syndrome, learning difficulties, mood disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) or other special educational needs.
Tips for Learning and Teaching

- Develop empathy with the student and understand that you are not the cause of defiance, but rather an outlet for it.
- It is important to remain objective when interacting with the student.
- Identify skills or attributes that you can reinforce.
- Remain positive; give praise and positive reinforcement when the student demonstrates flexibility and/or co-operation.
- Be approachable and act as a positive role model.
- Display classroom rules and a daily schedule so the student knows what to expect. Add visual cues to the rules to provide for students who may have literacy difficulties. Prioritising rules for the student is also useful.
- Consistency of application of agreed rules by all stakeholders in the school is needed with students with CD. Rules need to be realistic, specific, consistent and proactive.
- Differentiate learning and teaching.
- Programmes that deal with anger management and foster emotional intelligence may be effective.
- It is important to work in partnership with parents and/or carers.
- Put a reward system in place where the student values the outcome.
- Set targets for behaviour and learning that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and within a timescale (SMART).
- Create workstations where the student can listen to his/her choice of music for example and work independently. Earphones with controlled volume can be used to avoid disruption to the rest of the class.
- Peer mentoring with other students may be effective, particularly for organisational purposes.
- Devise an exit strategy (e.g. provide the student with a red card to display if he/she needs a time out).
- Build relationships with other students through Circle Time activities, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), drama, role play and peer mediation.
- Remember rewards work better than sanctions.
- Implement a behaviour contract with the student and ask for the student’s help in improving matters.
- Minimise distractions.
Minimise transitions and where transitions are necessary ensure they are clearly signalled. Consider the use of a song, a sound, a gesture or an object.

Try to establish if there are triggers for the student’s behaviour through recording the antecedents (what happened before the problem behaviour), the behaviour itself and the consequences (what happened after the behaviour). This is often referred to as establishing the ABC’s.

Give the student additional responsibilities. Begin by getting the student used to carrying out small and reasonable requests.

Provide the student with a choice of outcomes where possible.

Allow the student to help others in his/her areas of strength.

Develop a self-esteem programme and explicitly teach social skills.

Seat the student near a good role model.

Reward short periods of success.

Reward effort as much as achievement.

Break tasks into small manageable chunks for the student.

Agree methods by which the student can engage your attention.

Allocate clear roles when organising group work.
Focus on the incident not the student and focus on as few as possible behaviours at a time. Decide what behaviour you will ignore and what you will not accept. Clearly communicate the consequences for the behaviours you will not accept.

Avoid raising your voice or exhibiting any emotion. Be neutral and speak calmly, saying something similar to ‘As you broke this rule this is what you will have to do’. Be like a referee, who simply states the consequence and holds the player accountable.

Try not to allow the student an opportunity to argue.

For students who have difficulties with change consider the use of a visual timetable/schedule. This may have sequential pictures/photographs of the activities/lessons for the day. Examples of visual timetables/schedules are presented here.


Additional Resources/References


6. Special Education Support Service (SESS) lists external websites related to emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems and behaviour management which can be accessed from: http://www.sess.ie/
Psychosis can be defined as the presence of disruptions in thinking, accompanied by delusions or hallucinations, along with an alteration in thought processes. A clinical diagnosis is required. While incidents of psychosis amongst students are low, it is important to note that students experience the same range and types of psychotic symptoms as adults. Psychosis is a term that encapsulates different subgroups, the most common being schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Warning signs for psychosis may include changes in sleep patterns, withdrawal from family, friends and other social activities, difficulty understanding what others are saying, reticence, hoarding objects or searching through other’s belongings, wearing inappropriate combinations of clothes, diminished motivation, decreased ability to concentrate, erratic behaviour, paranoia and anxiety. (It is important to note that delusions and hallucinations are quite different to the vivid imagination that many young students have.)

Among students with schizophrenia internalising behaviours such as paranoia, anxious thoughts, and suspiciousness are reported to be more common than externalising acting out behaviours such as temper tantrums, aggression, opposition and hostility. In the student with bipolar disorder, delusions may be characterised by an excited energetic state. There will be increased energy and physical activity, and racing thoughts and speech that may be confused and irrational. Some students may have delusions whereby they think they have special powers. Alternatively, the student may become extremely withdrawn and inactive, possibly not moving or speaking for extended periods.

Most students with psychosis have been assessed as falling within the average range of IQ (Intelligence Quotient) on standardised IQ tests. Thus, if a student with a psychotic disorder is having problems with schoolwork, there might be a number of other possible reasons for this. There may be primary problems implicit in the disorder itself such as some form of learning difficulty. Problems may also stem from coping with delusions or hallucinations, paranoia, attention deficits and hyperactivity, social and emotional problems, low self-esteem, or side effects of medication.
Students with psychotic disorders often experience difficulty making friends and maintaining friendships and benefit from social skills training and peer-mentoring systems.

Students may need to be explicitly taught problem-solving skills as they try to cope with the school day.

Problems with attention and impulsiveness can cause disruptions in classroom routines.

Homework may take an excessive amount of time and may never get completed.

Some students with psychotic disorders often appear not to be listening when spoken to, have difficulty organising things, are easily distracted and tend to fidget.

If a student suffers from an acute episode of psychosis, support and safety are the two primary considerations and backup procedures will need to be in place to remove the student to safety.

Attendance may be an issue as behaviour and moods may be erratic and unpredictable.

Frequent communication with the student’s parents/carers is desirable to ensure a consistent approach is taken to supporting the student.
Additional Resources/References


4. Mental Health Ireland, website: http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/


7. Special Education Support Service (SESS) lists external websites related to emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems and behaviour management, website: http://www.sess.ie/

SECTION 4: Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems

Notes