

Recognising and managing oppositional defiant disorder

Dylan is a child living in vulnerable circumstances who has displayed defiant behaviour since kindergarten.

Dylan is the 7 year old son of Felicity (32) and has a sister Sienna (9). Felicity is in her third relationship since having her children and is now with Brad (35) whom she has been living with for 12 months. Felicity does not work and relies on Brad for financial support. Brad is a factory worker on a low wage and they both have health care cards.

Felicity often falls asleep on the couch early in the evening after drinking a bottle of wine. If she falls asleep before the kids have eaten dinner, Sienna makes herself and her brother a sandwich and then reads a book to Dylan before they go to bed. Brad is often not home until after 8pm. He goes to the pub after work and doesn't see the children as his responsibility as he is not biologically related to them.

Brad and Felicity argue often. Brad has frequent violent outbursts towards Felicity in front of the children. He is also very aggressive toward both Dylan and Sienna, threatening to hurt them if they don't behave and do what he tells them to do. Brad is constantly giving them orders to get him beers from the fridge and food from the pantry. Dylan started having angry outbursts toward the end of his kindergarten year, which progressed into his early school years. Dylan is now in Grade 2 and has been displaying temper tantrums and aggressive behaviour towards other children in the

school yard, hitting them and calling them names. He loses his temper easily, and argues with teachers when they ask him to do simple tasks like handing out pencils to class mates or taking something to the office.

At home Dylan is always lashing out at his sister and so at night Felicity has resorted to locking his bedroom door so he can't get out. In his bedroom, Dylan bangs on the walls, throws clothing all over the room and tries to damage anything he can. When he finally falls asleep, it is often not in his bed. Felicity checks on him late at night when she can't hear any noise, but if she finds him on the floor, she leaves him there as she is frightened he will have an outburst if she moves him into his bed.

Dylan is a very anxious child and often has low moods. When he is feeling sad, he sits alone in the playground. When he plays with other kids he finds himself becoming angry and lashing out at them over the rules of the games they are playing. Due to Dylan's angry behaviours intensifying over the last nine months, his teachers had a meeting and asked Felicity to come to the school to discuss her son's behaviour.

Felicity was reluctant to go to the school because she is embarrassed by Dylan's out of control behaviour. At the meeting, Dylan's teachers and the school counsellor informed Felicity that Dylan was not progressing academically.

They also told her they had noticed other children didn't want to play with Dylan as he would argue with them. They described his disobedient behaviour when asked to complete basic tasks and suggested that Dylan see their local doctor to discuss a referral for further assessment and support.