



## Oppositional Behavior

Oppositional Behavior is often part of normal development for 2 to 3 year olds and early adolescents. However, openly uncooperative and hostile behavior becomes a serious concern when it is so frequent and consistent that it stands out when compared with other children of the same age and developmental level and when it affects the child's social, family and academic life. Often it accompanies Attention Deficit Disorder or mood disorder. Parents have a difficult time managing this type of behavior because the child's behavior seems to escalate the more the parents try to use typical discipline techniques.

**How will you recognize this type of behavior?** The child will oppose anything that you or the family wants to happen. No matter what you might ask or request, the child's first response is "NO" or some other negative response. They may argue, talk back, disobey, and defy parents, teachers and other adults. It is most frustrating and annoying for parents to deal with this attitude. Sometimes, children will oppose things that they might like or enjoy. It is as if their first response to anything has to be negative, no matter what they like or enjoy. **Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)** is defined as an ongoing pattern of uncooperative, defiant, and hostile behaviors that seriously interfere with the younger's day to day functioning.

### **Symptoms of ODD may include:**

- Spiteful or vindictive.
- Temper lost easily and often.
- Argues with adults.
- Refuses to comply with adults' requests or rules.
- Blames others for his or her mistakes or behaviors.
- Resentful, often angry.
- Annoys people deliberately.
- Touchy, difficult to approach.

Symptoms are usually seen in multiple settings, but may be noticeable at home or at school. One to sixteen percent of all school-age children and adolescents have ODD. Management of this type of behavior can be quite difficult and frustrating for the family. A child presenting with ODD symptoms should have a comprehensive evaluation. It may be difficult to improve the symptoms of ODD without treating the coexisting disorder. Some children with ODD may go on to develop conduct disorder.



---

### Treatment of ODD may include:

- Parent Management Training Programs to help parents and others manage the child's behavior.
- Individual Psychotherapy to develop more effective anger management.
- Family Psychotherapy to improve communication and mutual understanding.
- Cognitive Problem-Solving Skills Training and Therapies to assist with problem solving and decrease negativity.
- Social Skills Training to increase flexibility and improve social skills and frustration tolerance with peers.

ODD may require a different approach to be successful. One resource for parents might be a book titled "The Explosive Child." This book was written by Dr. Ross Green, a clinical psychologist. He views oppositional behavior as a "learning disability," and believes that the children do not know how to act any different. His approach is novel and often quite helpful.

Below, you will find some options that might be helpful as a parent of an oppositional child.

- **Avoid Punitive Discipline** - Typical discipline that we might use like "because I said so," and "I said no" or "your grounded" will not work with children who are oppositional. These forms of discipline only incite and cause more arguments.
- **Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say** - Be consistent! Say exactly what you mean and stay with what you mean! Do not open the situation for doubt. Do not argue. Say quietly what you expect and then say no more. Do not respond to objections, walk away and ignore them. Do not repeat yourself.
- **Choose Your Battles** - Ignore things that are not important. Do not over rate an issue; if it isn't a big issue do not make it one by a big fight.
- **Do Not Provoke** - If you know a situation will incite and provoke your child, then do everything you can to prevent or avoid that situation.
- **Avoid Yelling and Screaming** - Telling and screaming only provokes and increases the chance for an argument or fight.
- **Know Your Child's Temperament** - If you become more aware of your child's temperament and more sensitive to their needs, you will gradually be able to improve their ability to deal with you and your discipline
- **Prepare For Change** - Oppositional children do not do well with changes in their schedules. Prepare them for these necessary changes. Give them strategies to deal with these changes and rewards for complying.
- **Give Choices** - Offer choices whenever possible. This allows for the child's involvement, this will improve their participation and buy-in to the family's needs.
- **Make It a "User Friendly" Environment** - Use Velcro shoes instead of ties. Establish quiet time for everyone in the home, at homework time. Adopt an intercom from the kitchen to the child's bedroom, to prevent screaming when you need his or her attention. Use memory cards throughout the house, to post lists of things to do in the bathroom in the morning and chores.
- **Novelty is a "Key"** - New procedures or options for discipline will always help.



- 
- **Avoid Nagging Increases Tolerance Gradually** - By gradually developing tolerance to difficult situations will assist the child over time to be capable of tolerating other changes.
  - **Avoid “Melt Downs”** - “Melt downs” are the end result of too much frustration leading to rage, fights and tantrums. These are not good for the child. They should be avoided. If you can see one coming on, you need to learn how to prevent these.
  - **Build on Positives** - Always praise your child when he or she has shown flexibility or cooperation. Build on the positive circumstances; this might buy you another positive episode.
  - **Time Out For Parents** - If you are about to make the conflict worse, know better and take time out for yourself to prevent overreacting.
  - **Reasonable, Appropriate Limits** - Set up a reasonable, age appropriate limits with consequences that can be enforced consistently.
  - **Take Care of Yourself** -Handle your own stress by exercise, relaxation and respite care for yourself. Use support people (teachers, coaches, and spouse) when possible. If you are miserable get professional help for yourself.

Joseph C. Stegman, M.D.  
George W. Hatley, PA-C

Maricela Dominguez Gulbronson, M.D. F.A.A.P.  
Angela Noone, CPNP

Mark C. Clayton, M.D.

301 Medical Park Drive, St 202B, Concord, NC 28025

Phone: 704-403-2626 | Fax: 704-403-2699 | [www.behavioralped.com](http://www.behavioralped.com)