

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

All children present as irritable and defiant at times, especially when they are hungry, tired, upset, or frustrated. Such oppositional behavior is a normal part of development particularly for 2-3 year olds and even for early adolescents. However, in children with ODD, the openly negative, hostile, and defiant behavior occurs so frequently and significantly across multiple settings that it stands out from other children of a similar age and developmental level.

What to Look for:

Children with ODD display significant symptoms, for at least six months to the extent of interfering with academic, social, and familial functioning. These behaviors often occur in a variety of settings yet may be more noticeable in one particular environment such as at home or at school. Look for...

- Often angry or resentful
- Frequent temper tantrums
- Easily annoyed or touchy
- Argues with adults
- Deliberately annoys others
- Refuses to comply with adult rules / requests
- Blames others for mistakes or behaviors
- Spiteful or vindictive
- Talks in a hurtful manner when upset

Treatment Options:

Interacting with a child who seems to “never listen” can be quite frustration for parents, teachers, and peers. However, many children will respond to a combination of treatment across home, school, and community milieus.

- Comprehensive evaluation to ensure accurate diagnosis as ODD often presents with other co-existing conditions
- Individual therapy to develop more effective anger management skills and to cope with the social, familial, and academic consequences
- Family therapy to develop a supportive environment tailored to these children’s unique challenges
- Social skills training to enhance positive peer interactions
- Medication to diminish symptoms
- School interventions to implement classroom based accommodations to decrease symptoms hindering academic progress

Strategies for Parenting Children with ODD

1. Build on the positives, even if only in small increments, praising your child often, particularly when he or she has shown flexibility or cooperation.
2. Establish age appropriate and reasonable limits and consequences and be consistent in implementation.
3. Utilize strategies to prepare your child for changes in routine or structure, as children with ODD often do not respond well to such changes.
4. Whenever possible, offer age appropriate choices to allow your child some sense of control of his or her environment. However, be cautious to not over-stimulate your child with too many choices.
5. Be concrete and specific when setting forth rules, requests, and expectations. Do not repeat yourself or plead with your child. Do not waver or give in to your child’s defiant behavior.
6. Pick your battles, setting priorities. Focus on what is most important and ignore other aspects to avoid your household becoming a constant battleground.
7. Maintain a calm and peaceful environment, being a positive role model. Yelling and screaming often only serve to escalate an argument and set a negative example for your child or teen.
8. Make all possible attempts to create a “user friendly” environment for your child to diminish frustration. Try Velcro shoes instead of ties. Use reminder cards throughout the house. Post lists of chores and responsibilities
9. Take a time out for yourself if you feel frustrated and feel as if you are about to make a conflict worse. This is positive role modeling for your child. Be sure to praise your child when he or she follows your good example.
10. Focus on managing your feelings of stress and frustration in response to your child’s defiance. Find stress reduction strategies such as exercise or relaxation. Use friends, family, or other community groups for respite and support.

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