

Is Your Child Oppositional?

All children are oppositional from time to time, particularly when tired, hungry, stressed or upset. They may argue, talk back, disobey, and defy parents, teachers, and other adults. Oppositional behavior is often a normal part of development for two to three 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.

In children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), there is an ongoing pattern of uncooperative, defiant, and hostile behavior toward authority figures that seriously interferes with the youngster's day to day functioning.

Symptoms of ODD may include:

- frequent temper tantrums
- excessive arguing with adults
- active defiance and refusal to comply with adult requests and rules
- deliberate attempts to annoy or upset people
- blaming others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior
- frequent anger and resentment
- mean and hateful talking when upset
- seeking revenge

The symptoms are usually seen in multiple settings, but may be more noticeable at home or at school. The causes of ODD are unknown, but many parents report that their child with ODD was more rigid and demanding than the child's siblings from an early age. A child with ODD can be very difficult for parents. Biological and environmental factors may have a role.

A child presenting with ODD symptoms should have a comprehensive evaluation. It is important to look for other disorders which may be present; such as, attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, mood disorders (depression, bipolar disorder) and anxiety disorders. 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 Training Programs to help manage the child's behavior, Individual therapy to develop more effective anger management, Family therapy to improve communication and Social Skills Training to increase flexibility and improve frustration tolerance with peers.

Parents can help their child with ODD in the following ways:

- Always build on the positives.
- Take a time out or break if you are about to make the conflict with your child worse, not better. This is good modeling for your child.
- Pick your battles. Since the child with ODD has trouble avoiding power struggles, prioritize the things you want your child to do.
- Set up reasonable, age appropriate limits with consequences that can be enforced consistently.
- Maintain interests other than your child with ODD, so that managing your child doesn't take all your time and energy.
- Manage your own stress with exercise and relaxation.