



Warnings:

Tips and Tricks: What to Do When a Child Refuses to Follow Rules or Misbehaves

General Information

What should you do when your child refuses to do something (e.g., negotiates about turning the TV off) or to stop doing something disturbing (e.g., slamming their bedroom door)?

Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) very often co-occurs with ADHD. It is important to differentiate the two problems to be able to take appropriate action because ODD considerably adds to the problems of children with ADHD.



The infosheet “**Characteristics of ODD**” can help you determine if your child also has ODD, although the ADHD assessment should have already identified the presence of ODD. If this is the case, please read the infosheet “**How to Prevent and Better Manage Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD).**”

Oppositional children or teens particularly enjoy testing the boundaries. They usually rely on their ability to make you lose your temper. Since they do not like following the instructions or requirements set by others, oppositional children/teens try to take control by arguing, by passively opposing you and by testing your ability to structure them and to assume your parental authority.

Parental authority

Assuming your parental authority does not mean intervening in a drastic and very severe way. It is closely linked to your ability to establish your role as a parent, your expectations, your requirements, your values and especially your limits! Your child already has friends. However, your child has only you as a parent. It is important not to mix up these roles. You can be your child’s friend when your parental authority is not being challenged. However, when your child opposes you, they need you to be a parent in order to help them accept limits, understand the importance of structure and accept responsibility for their words or actions.

With oppositional children/teens, the following tip often helps to remember these guidelines: *In baseball, three strikes and you’re out!*

The same applies when penalizing oppositional or disruptive behaviour: **three warnings lead to the loss of a privilege!**



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cliniquefocus.com / attentiondeficit-info.com

Developed by Clinique FOCUS, under the coordination of Johanne Perreault, DPsy, in collaboration with Dr. Annick Vincent. (Revised: May 2013)

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Careful, though: You must be consistent and do what you say!

1. To avoid acting impulsively, you and the other parent need to determine in advance the tasks/chores that you want your child/teen to do or the behaviours or attitudes that you want to focus your interventions on.
2. Then, for each chore to be done or each behaviour/attitude to change, you must determine a realistic and feasible loss of privilege.
3. It is important to apply that loss of privilege promptly (e.g., the same day).
4. You must **absolutely avoid** giving consequences that last days or weeks or that will be applied in a few days or weeks.

There are simple reasons for this:

- Giving a consequence that is too long generally results in provoking resentment and weakening the bond of trust between the child and parent.
 - Giving a consequence (loss of privilege) that takes place in the next few days or weeks is not likely to happen either because it gets forgotten or because the child/teen will have changed their behaviour between the time the threat of a consequence was given and the time when the consequence must take effect.
5. It is important to target specific chores/tasks or behaviours/attitudes. You can use the infosheet “**Routines and Loss of Privileges**” as a visual reminder of the agreement, which will decrease the risks of opposition and arguments.
 6. When your oppositional child/teen refuses to do an expected chore or to stop a disruptive behaviour, you must then say: *I’m asking you for the first time to do or to stop doing such and such a thing.*
 7. You must repeat the same instruction by specifying that this is the second time and **that if you need to repeat it a third time, you will be forced to withdraw a privilege.**
 8. Watch out, though: There can be no half warnings!



9. If you must repeat your warning 3 times, you must then say: *I have no choice but to withdraw a privilege because you chose to not do or to stop doing such and such a thing.*

Important points

- It is very important for you to do what you say!
- If you threatened to withdraw a privilege, you must follow through, even if your child/teen has been nice all day, and apply the consequence that you stated earlier in the day (hence the importance of ensuring that the loss of a privilege is realistic and feasible).
- You need only say: *I noticed that you tried to do better all day and I appreciate that. However, this morning you did or did not do such and such a thing, so I have no choice but to withdraw this privilege because this morning you chose not to do what I asked of you. But I'm sure that things will go better tomorrow.*
- Both parents must support each other and never contradict the other's action or authority in front of the child.

Conclusion

Parenting children or teens with ADHD requires a good understanding of ADHD. It also requires a hefty dose of patience and unconditional love.

However, when ADHD is combined with ODD, parents can gradually reach a point of exhaustion. This makes it important for them to break their isolation by asking for help from different professionals who specialize in ADHD and its co-occurring disorders.

