



Interventions Helping to Prevent and Better Manage Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

NOTICE:

The strategies proposed in this document concern young people with oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) who do not respond to the standard strategies that are often more effective when intervening with young people without ODD.

When we say "dole out your praise sparingly," this does not mean that parents should refrain from praising their child; rather, it means that they should develop the ability to formulate positive feedback and to provide positive reinforcement that is more conducive to reducing oppositional behaviour.

This document does not aim to replace effective parenting sessions but is designed to recall the parenting skills explained in these sessions.

It is important to be attentive and to adapt our attitudes according to our understanding of the reasons behind the oppositional behaviour.

The characteristics of oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) include a set of behaviours that are not typically observed in young people of the same developmental age; these behaviours are negativistic, hostile or provocative, and persistent (lasting at least six (6) months, during which at least four (4) or more of the following behaviours are present):



- Often loses his/her temper
- Often argues with adults
- Often actively defies or refuses to comply with adults' requests or rules
- Often deliberately annoys people
- Often blames others for his/her mistakes or misbehaviour
- Is often touchy or easily annoyed by others
- Is often angry and resentful
- Is often spiteful or vindictive



Young people can be oppositional for various reasons. For example, children, like adults, may exhibit oppositional behaviour as a way of seeking attention, may refuse to perform a chore because they do not feel like it, or may feel anxious about or incapable of complying with a request and will express it “in their own way.” For some, anxiety or hypersensitivity to change may translate as rigidity, a reaction of deflection or a tantrum in response to a new request.

It is often difficult to identify the reason underlying the oppositional behaviour, especially when the child **REACTS STRONGLY**, which can cause the other person to experience feelings of anger or impotence associated with reactions or attitudes that can themselves stoke the conflict. In some cases, standard intervention principles, such as positive conditioning, must be nuanced and adapted to the underlying issue. The strategies proposed in this document concern young people with ODD who do not respond to standard intervention strategies.

This document provides general information on the ways to reduce opposition and arguing in young people with ODD who do not respond to standard strategies. It does not aim to replace effective parenting sessions but is designed to recall the parenting skills explained in such sessions. If you notice a significant deterioration in your child/teenager’s behaviour, it is important to cease all interventions and to quickly consult a psychologist to obtain more in-depth professional advice in order to better identify the possible causes of this behaviour.

Provide parental leadership, stimulate intellect, without stoking the conflict!

My oppositional child/teenager imposes his/her meal choices and would like to be in charge of the household. What should I do?

It is the role of parents to establish and manage the organization of routines, including the choice of menus, but also to encourage children to actively participate in the daily life of the household, according to their level of development. As a parent, not only is it your role to make these types of decisions, it is also up to you to act as a responsible adult toward your oppositional child if you want the child to know that he/she can trust you, to respect your parental authority and to respect you . . .



Have you ever heard of the Cs of positive parenting?

Parents can only benefit from establishing a **coherent** framework that includes **clear** directions with **consensus** on the **consequences**, and from applying them calmly and, above all, **consistently**.

Asking oppositional children to choose what they want to wear or eat not only promotes opposition but ultimately increases the likelihood of provoking anxiety. **You are the parent**. It is up to you to make sure that your child wears clothes appropriate for the daily weather forecast and eats food that is not only healthy but that also fits your budget and weekly menus.

Take advantage of pleasant and non-conflicting situations to discuss and nurture reflection in your oppositional child or teenager. However, as soon as you must assert your parental authority and your child/teenager starts to argue, it is **vital not to waste your words!**

In such case, you must develop the reflex of limiting the discussion to the topic of the dispute, because your “opponent” is an expert in leading you down to his/her favourite playing field: arguing!!!

Countercheck opposition and arguments

If your child/teen argues against, opposes or refuses to accept the loss of a privilege or the need to do what is being asked, quietly say: *“It is my role as a parent, I have no choice but to do or say such and such a thing, . . .”*

If he/she tries to negotiate your request, offer two (equal) choices that are suitable to YOU (e.g., “Do you want to clean your room or run the vacuum?”)

If he/she opposes a choice (e.g., what clothing to wear):

- Talk like a BROKEN RECORD:
Example: *“Do you want to wear the blue sweater or this black sweater?”* followed by *“Do you want to wear the blue sweater or this black sweater?”* and so forth.
- Above all, do not add any other choice and refuse any bargaining.
Example: The child insists on wearing the blue sweater with a pair of trousers that was not one of the choices.



It is important to stay calm and to avoid the trap of falling into a discussion or an argument.

If your child/teen raises his/her voice (which will obviously happen), do not fall into this trap because this strategy is designed to make you lose your patience and your temper . . . Act like a seasoned psychologist by LOWERING YOUR TONE OF VOICE.

- Remember to talk like a BROKEN RECORD, while keeping calm and speaking softly. See how many repetitions you can achieve (5,? 10,? or 20?)

During transitions (such as getting ready for bed or for school):

- Use depersonalization (Examples: Say: *"It is time to do such and such."* and point to the clock. Say: *"It's the rule."* and point to the wall poster with the written rule).
- Start talking like a broken record again if the opposition or arguing continues.
- Take responsibility (Example: Say: *"I have no choice but to play my role as a parent because you chose to do that . . ."*).
- Choose the path of intentionally turning a blind eye. It may sometimes be necessary to ignore a behaviour and to draw attention to something else.
- Choose your words and avoid accusations: Instead of saying, *"I don't want to talk to you because you aren't being nice to me,"* say, *"Your behaviour or what you've just said to me is unacceptable."*

Set a good example! Teach your child an effective way to solve conflicts by using the following strategies:

1. Talk to yourself (aloud if necessary)
2. Calm down
3. Take deep breaths.
4. Express your expectations without emotional outbursts (Example: *"What you said is unacceptable. So, I'm going to ask you to take a few minutes to calm down, and I'll do likewise. We'll have a talk later, and you will be able to apologize nicely, and we'll be able to get back to our conversation."*)
5. Casually leaving the room or changing topics if the situation becomes too tense can be very effective.



Pay positive attention to pleasant behaviour!

Do you pay more attention to your oppositional child during conflict situations than when he/she is calm and acting in a pleasant manner?

Develop the habit of paying positive attention (a hug, kiss or wink) when your oppositional child/teenager is calm and busy doing something else. Surprise him or her in the act of behaving well!

Example: When your oppositional child/teen is calm and quiet (e.g., watching TV or using the computer), this is the time to pay him or her some positive attention. This is the time to casually sit with him/her, to pay attention to or show interest in the TV show or video game and to mention how much you appreciated a behaviour or positive reaction that occurred a little while earlier.

Avoid using “killjoy statements” when your child or teenage acts correctly properly, such as: *“See, if you always obeyed me right away, things would go a lot better at home.”*

Try a different way of praising your child.

In our effective parenting sessions, when we address the issue of “doling out praise differently” with a child with ODD, this approach may appear, at first glance, to be counter-intuitive. N.B.: **This does not mean refraining from praising** the child; rather it means that parents should develop the ability to formulate positive feedback and to provide positive reinforcement that is more conducive to decreasing oppositional behaviour.

If you notice that your child/teenager reverts to oppositional behaviour or a poor attitude within minutes or hours of your having praised him/her, ask yourself whether the following hypotheses apply:

- ✓ Is your praise coloured with reproach?

Example:

“Good job! You did that really well!” It would be great if that could happen more often! You see, everybody is happy when you stay calm!

Could be replaced with: *“Good job! You did that really well!”*



- ✓ Does your praise lead to the impression of needing “to be obedient” later on?

We **can** and **must** point out good behaviour or a good attitude! However, it is more effective to praise an oppositional child/teen’s good behaviour by taking into account that, for some young people with ODD, “accepting praise” means that they will later feel “obliged” to behave well, especially since they hate the feeling of being conciliatory or being seen by others as being conciliatory . . .

Here are a few tips:

- Praise your child/teenager **discretely**, in private, not in front of others.
- **Delay** your praise a little rather than at the exact time the good behaviour occurs.
- Praise them **briefly, while doing something else, without looking at them directly in the eye** (this is less confrontational for oppositional children/teens).
- Take them by surprise!!

Example: Your oppositional child has just put his/her plate in the dish washer without being asked.

Suggestion: While doing something else (e.g., folding laundry), mention that you appreciated this, without looking him/her directly in the eye, and saying: “ *I really appreciated it when you put your plate in the dish washer.*” Then, quickly switch topics, such as by saying: “*Have you seen my grocery list?*”

You will see how your oppositional child/teen will gradually tend to react positively to this type of interaction because he/she will have less the impression of being conciliatory. Your child/teen will gradually discover that he/she is drawing your attention not for oppositional behaviour but instead for positive behaviour.

Have fun! It is a safe bet that you will notice that you will stay in control, that body will stay relaxed and that you will have a good chuckle when noticing that your oppositional child/teenager is discovering a worthy opponent: **a constant, consistent person capable of assuming the role of parent!** In this way, you will show a **good example** by demonstrating that there is no need to get angry and to argue to get something. The oppositional child/teenager will make the connection that he/she will not get attention by arguing or being oppositional. The ultimate aim is for the child or teenager with ODD to learn to **discuss without arguing!**

Clinique FOCUS team

