Dealing with Opposition

The workshop suggestions are based on the following programs:

- Parent-Child Interaction Therapy [link]
- PCIT Treatment Manual by Sheila M. Eyberg 1999 [link]
- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychology [link]
- Education and Behavior [link]
- Intervention Central [link]
- We are teachers [link]
- Brain Balance Achievement Centers [link]

What do you do if your child refuses to do homework?

Or just does everything opposite from what you want him or her to do?

Steps in Dealing with Opposition

1) Find out why — they may have a reason other than they just don’t want to do it.
2) Stay calm - Don’t let them push your buttons.
3) If they are truly oppositional, take control of the opposition with boundaries, consequences, structure, expectation, and diligence.

Oppositional kids may also...........

- Possess a strong need for control, and will do just about anything to gain power.
- Typically deny responsibility for their misbehavior and have little insight into how they impact others.
- Be socially exploitative and very quick to notice how others respond. He then uses these responses to his advantage in family or social environments, or both.
- Tolerate a great deal of negativity – in fact they seem to thrive on large amounts of conflict, anger and negativity from others, and are frequently the winners in escalating battles of negativity.
- Have academic problems
- Be impulsive
- Have trouble sitting still.
1) Find out why they don’t want to do their homework or complete a task

- They can’t sit anymore after sitting all day at school
- Homework or chores bore them
- Don’t understand the homework or task
- Anxious about getting it wrong and so procrastinates rather than get it started
- Something bothering them at school or home (bully, divorce)
- Want to do something else fun like TV or videogames

No!

Is just oppositional to everything we want them to do

2) Don’t let them push your buttons

- What happens if you don’t get your soda?
- You kick and hit the machine. Get angry. Shake it.
- But then you give up.

If your child can get you angry by being oppositional, they will keep doing it. They will keep pushing your button and you will keep giving them what they want. What they want might be avoiding homework or getting their way.

If you become angry or frustrated:

- You give them power to rule over your emotions
- You may get so frustrated that you do the homework for them or just give up on them following the rule
- They associate homework or rules with negative images of you yelling
- Remember that you are their role model and if you are angry and frustrated, they will imitate you

Getting a reaction out of you may be their chief hobby

**They like to see you mad**

- They try to provoke reactions in people and are often successful in creating power struggles.
- Therefore it is important to have a plan and try not to show any emotion when reacting to them.
- If you react too emotionally, you may make big mistakes in dealing with your child.
- Plan in advance what to do when your child engages in certain behaviors and be prepared to follow through calmly.

**Choose your battles**

- Decide which behaviors you are going to ignore and which ones you can’t stand or are dangerous.
- Most oppositional children are doing too many things you dislike to include all of them in a behavior management plan.
- Thus, target only a few important behaviors, rather than trying to fix everything.

If you want your child to be calm, then you may need to calm yourself first

If you feel yourself getting angry, leave the situation for about 60 seconds.

During that time, distract yourself with something else (do not think about what your child did to make you angry).

Remind yourself that you do not have to be angry to handle the problem. Your anger will actually make the situation harder to handle.

Breathe in slowly through your nose and out of your mouth a few times.

If your child answered any of these:

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...then see Homework without the Headache workshop at bcslibrary.org/elementary

If your child fits the description below, then this workshop may help

Is just oppositional to everything we want them to do

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- **Is just oppositional to everything we want them to do**
Stay calm, brief, and businesslike

Lengthy lectures can trigger defiance.

Brief responses do not give them the reward of your prolonged attention.

They tune you out after some point of yelling and then they feel victimized and justified to be defiant.

Don’t get entangled in arguments

If you find yourself arguing with your child........

- Take a time out to cool down
- Or repeat your original request in a calm tone with no emotion
- Or impose the consequence that you told them they would get

Reframe your struggle

- Parents of oppositional kids may feel victimized by their child’s temper tantrums and strong will
- Rather than see yourself as the result of your child’s will, see yourself as the builder of your child’s future.

- You are not a victim
- You are your child’s teacher
- You are in control

Many children have been assigned identities by the important adults in their lives. They have been called “bad”, “not very bright”, “rude”, “smart,” etc.

- If you say that they are something, then they accept that you are right. They adopt that identity. What do bad people do?...bad things.
- Don’t say that a child IS a particular type of person. Not even a positive name like “bright” or kind.” You can say that the behavior or action was rude or kind when talking to them, but when you tell them they “are” that, they feel powerless in changing their behavior.

3) Take control of the opposition with boundaries, consequences, structure, expectation, and diligence.

If you decide that they “just don’t want to do the work,” don’t allow them to distract, whine, argue, or complain to get out of homework or chores.

It also takes boundary setting, structure, and a will to give consequences every time your child is oppositional.

Set boundaries

The oppositional child needs boundaries and rules with limited choices – this helps them believe they are safe, yet have some power

- Deliver a command in a calm firm tone of voice
- Give them small choices within your boundaries
- Explain the consequences if they do not do the task and give them rewards when they accomplish it

- “Please start your homework.”
- “You can choose either 15 minutes of TV or 15 minutes of videogame playing when you are done.”
- “Your homework needs to be completed in order for you to watch TV or play videogames.”
Create boundaries

- Life can be scary if no boundaries are in place for a child
- Set clear expectations around homework and responsibilities
- Take into consideration their attention span, their strengths and weaknesses in school subjects, and their ability to work independently without your guidance.

What Is a Boundary?

- A boundary is a definite place where your responsibility ends and another person's begins. It stops you from doing things for others that they should do for themselves.
- A boundary also prevents someone from the consequences of their destructive behavior that they need to experience in order to grow.

Setting ground rules before your child is oppositional

**Decide together**

- State your rules with clear, simple commands. Ex. Follow directions without yelling
- Decide what should be the consequences if the rules are not followed
- Decide what could be a reward if the rules are followed

**Stick to the consequences**

- If your child thinks he or she will get away with misbehavior when you're too tired to deal with it, they will continue to misbehave.
- Be consistent in every situation.
- If they break a rule, they get the consequence.
- They will test you, so be ready to always give the response that you both agreed on.

Direct Commands

- A command should be direct rather than indirect
- A command should tell your child what to do instead of what not to do
- Commands should be specific and, brief, with one direction at a time
- Avoid using their name before a sentence. This adds another demand which is "look at me."
- "Please sit at the table" instead of "Would you like to sit at the table?"
- Rather than saying "stop running around," say, "please sit next to me."
- Rather than saying "clean up your room," say, "please pick up your toys and put them in the toy box."
- Praise them after each completed task

Direct Commands

- Commands should be age-appropriate. Use simple words in a command.
- Commands should be polite and respectful.
- Commands should be explained with a reason before they are started
- Choose your battles. Too many commands will frustrate them. Decide which ones are the most important

After a command

- Five second rule – after giving a command, say nothing and count for 5 seconds. If your child has not started by 5 seconds, then it’s a disobey
- Do not repeat the command or say anything until your child obeys or disobeys
- If they obey, praise them right away
- If they disobey, warn them about time out or their consequence. After 5 seconds, put them in time out or give the consequence.

Two-part choice statements

First, present the negative, or non-compliant, choice and its consequences

If...
"If you do not work on your homework, then you will not be allowed to watch TV tonight."

Then...

Then state the positive behavioral choice that you would like your child to select

If...
"If you finish your homework, then you get to choose what cartoon you want to watch on TV tonight."
Ignore negative behavior unless it is destructive or aggressive

- This may decrease negative attention-seeking.
- The behavior may tend to escalate before it decreases. Your child may test your ability to keep your cool.
- Praise your child immediately for any positive behavior. If a negative behavior stops, look at the child with a friendly look and comment on what the child is doing that is the opposite of negative behavior: “I’m glad that you said that quietly.”

**Ignore Within Reason**

- Ignoring a negative behavior may be an effective behavior-modification technique
- Don’t ignore risky or injurious behavior, but ignore whining, nagging, arguing until these stop
- S/he can crave attention with this. Ignoring can be effective if done consistently. If he is increasingly loud if ignored, tell him gently that talk can resume when he is calm

**Setting limits**

- Set up rules and consequences before child is upset – this avoids a spur of the moment rule or consequence that will set off their anger and opposition.
- Give them time to calm down a minute or two. Don’t expect them to be rational in the heat of the moment.
- Give them physical space if they are not doing something dangerous or destructive. Invading their personal space may give them a sense of you wanting to control them physically.

**Active ignore steps**

Helps your child notice the difference between your responses to inappropriate and appropriate behavior

1) Stay quiet
2) Drop your eyes
3) Pick up something fun and describe what you’re doing. Make it look exciting and fun
4) Continue ignoring until your child is doing something appropriate
4) Return to the activity with your child if he or she is ready to follow the direction

**Effective time-out**

**Time-out** is the removal of a child from all types of reinforcement (e.g., parent attention, toys, TV) for a specified short period of time as a consequence for misbehavior

- Time-out is a safe, effective way to help children regulate their behavior.
- Time-out teaches children that even when they misbehave, parents will treat them respectfully and consistently.
- Time-out works best with certain ages. Time-out can be used most effectively with children between the ages of 2 and 7 years.
- Keep time-out short. For children between the ages of 2 and 7, time-out does not need to exceed three minutes. However, make sure to end time-out only after the child is quiet for a few seconds. That way he/she will quickly learn that time-out ends only when he/she is calm and quiet.
- Time-out should be boring. Time-out works because a child has nothing to interest him/her. Remove any fun or distracting objects from the time-out space and avoid giving a child any attention.
- Time-out should be in a safe environment. Find a place where objects are out of reach. Make sure the time-out chair is safe. Parents should remain in a place where they are able to see their child in the chair, but should not make eye-contact.
- Time-out is not an escape. After a child sits in time-out, he/she should complete the task the parent originally asked him/her to do.

If the behavior is aggressive or destructive...

The parent must stop the child and deal with it if the child is hitting, biting, breaking objects, throwing, kicking, etc. Stopping them teaches them that positive behavior is needed for things like getting attention, listening to them, allowing them to choose, or play. It shows your child that you are setting limits to their behavior. Let them know what they did. “Video game time is stopping because you hit me.” Be specific.

If the behavior is aggressive or destructive...

Try redirecting their attention to another activity or removing them from the setting with time-out or just a safe place to calm down. If you catch them calming down, try rewarding their behavior with a verbal praise. “Good job calming down.” You may also promise them a favorite activity. “You were able to calm down, so tonight we will watch your favorite movie.” Rewards that focus on together time like watching a favorite movie together or going to the park, can add to positive experiences with the parent.
Know your child’s ability to complete a task

- What can they do within their limits and yours?

Once you and your child decide how long it should take to complete a task

Tell them you expect the task to be completed

- Agree on start time, breaks, and finish time
- Involving them in the rule setting and consequences give them a sense of power and choice
- Tell them what their consequences will be if not completed
- Tell them what their reward will be for completion

Be ready to give consequences or reward/praise for completions

- You must be willing to follow through on the consequence or reward every time. Otherwise your child will not take your request seriously.
- Praise should be specific. Ex. “Good job for picking up your clothes and putting them in the washer.”

Talking to your oppositional child

- Get to know your child – find out what they like and share experiences with them
- Allow them to set goals and decide together what will be the consequences if they don’t meet those goals

Avoid asking them “why” questions. Use “who, what, where, and how” to start your sentences

Avoid asking them many questions – they may feel interrogated, feel you’re not listening, or are disapproving of them

Use transition warnings to let your child know what is coming next. Here is an example, “In ten minutes it is time to turn off your video games and come eat dinner” or “After this show it is time for homework.”

Conversation suggestions

- Explain to your child that you will listen when they speak respectfully to you
- Calm your child if they are yelling or whining
- Listen for their main gripe between the whining or yelling
- If it is a legitimate problem or request, let him/her talk.
- Don’t interrupt until he/she finishes. Address concerns privately.

- Insist upon one rule- that you both be respectful.
- When decisions are needed, give two choices or options. Oppositional kids are more likely to complete or perform tasks that they have chosen. This also empowers them to make other decisions and helps them feel a part of the family.

Some non-threatening questions to ask them

Suggested questions and statements

- “What would work better?”
- “What could you have done differently to avoid the problem?”
- “How may I help you?”
- “What can I do to help you remember the rules?”
- Tell me what you think the problem is that keeps you from being successful at home.

Watch your body language and tone

- Do not stand over them or point your finger
- Try to get eye-level even if you have to sit
- Give them a warning/reminder look rather than an annoyed or angry look

- Use soft, firm tone of voice
- Use pauses to allow them a chance to speak
- Slow your conversation down
- Start with a soft reprimand reminder
Getting to know your child

Getting to know your child

Things that will make your child more oppositional

- Threatening your child. “If you don’t get in the car, I’m going to slap you.”
- Responding emotionally (i.e., getting angry or sarcastic).
- Confronting your child near their peers.
- Remaining in the interaction too long.
- Bribes.
- Trying to “convince.”
- “Putting down” your child.

Getting to know your child

Reflect appropriate talk – it says, “I hear you.”

Reflection is repeating/paraphrasing what your child says: “Yes, that’s a blue crayon.”
Allows child to lead the conversation
Shows child you’re really listening
Actually helps you learn to listen!
Shows you accept/understand what child is saying
Improves and increases child’s speech and language
May feel awkward at first, but becomes natural pretty quickly

Getting to know your child

Imitate appropriate talk and play – it says, “I see you.”

If your child is playing, sit with him or her and engage in the activity
This shows you approve of their behavior
It also increases your child’s imitation of you
It improves their attention span
It promotes healthy attachment

Establish a rapport with your child

- If your child perceives you as reasonable and fair, you’ll be able to work more effectively with him or her.
- Regardless of the situation do not get into a “yes you will!” contest. Silence is a better response.

Routines and jump starting them can help

- Set a homework or chore around the same time every day
- Help them get started on their task by beginning it with them
- Use visual cues as reminders. “Please go get your pencils out of the pencil can.”
- Remember to praise when they obey
Praise

- Provide recognition when the child exhibits appropriate behavior.
- However, be aware that since many oppositional children feel compelled to do the opposite of what you want, avoid direct, lavish praise.
- Following a commendation, a child might retaliate by tearing up his/her work or by hitting someone.
- Acknowledge small steps toward improvement by whispering a positive comment to your child. Avoid expressing your feelings like, “I am so proud of you!” Instead say something like, “This is A+ work.”

Suggested Do’s and Don’ts

**Do’s**

- Describe what your child is doing when they are doing something positive – “We’re raking leaves together” – it lets them know you are interested in their positive behavior.
- Reflect or repeat your child’s phrase – “I like to play this videogame.” “You’re having fun with that videogame.” – demonstrates understanding, interest, and increases verbal communication.
- Labeled praise – say specifically what you like about what your child is doing or saying – “Thank you for sharing your yogurt with me.”

**Don’ts**

- Criticism and sarcasm – it gives attention to the negative behaviors.
- Use only negative words such as “no,” “don’t,” “stop,” “quit,” “not” – oppositional kids respond negatively to these words and it increases opportunities for conflict.
- Ask many questions – may communicate parent is uncertain or not listening. Also may communicate parent disapproves of them.

Praise statements

- That’s a great way to....
- You’re doing a nice job of....
- You should be proud of yourself for.......
- I like it when you....
- What a wonderful idea to.......
- Thank you for........
- How sweet of you to...........
- I’m proud of you for........
- I’m so happy with you for...
- Super........
- I like it when you........
- It’s neat that you remembered to....
- I love you........

Rewarding the opposite

- Decide what behavior is the opposite of the problem behavior.
- Then give attention and praise to the good opposite behavior as much as you can.
- Try to spend some quality play time with your child. If they see that they can have fun with you, they may strive toward a more positive, happier relationship with you.

Privileges

- Set up expectations ahead of time and allow your child to earn privileges for following those expectations. This is much more effective for encouraging compliance than punishing your child or taking away privileges when they don’t do what you want them to do.
- Let your child have a say in what they want to work for. Allowing children to earn privileges puts the ball in their court. They know what is expected and they know what they have to do to earn the things they enjoy. They also feel a sense of pride when they earn what they worked for.
- When your child starts getting off track, remind him of what he is working towards rather than telling him what you will take away if he doesn’t listen.
- Research shows that children and adolescents are much more likely to do what is expected when they have the power to earn something, then when being threatened that you will take something from them.

Rewards

- Rewards can be simple and inexpensive.
- Praise can be a reward also.
- Stickers, tokens, or marks on a chart can let them see progress.
- A few ideas for rewards: extra computer time, eating lunch with a friend, additional free time, special day with a parent, to go alone with you to a fun place, slumber parties, activities with friends, a new toy.
- Avoid promising expensive things like toys, money, and going to the movies.
- If you have a time limit for TV or computer time, be cautious in giving extra time. They may begin to think that’s the new time limit.
More reward ideas

Remember....

- Your oppositional child will tend to misbehave so set realistic goals and not unattainable ones.
- Have clear expectations and firm boundaries.
- Make sure your child knows your expectations and stick with performing consequences and rewards. This helps build trust.
- Change in routine will tend to upset them and affect their behavior.
- Catch them in positive behavior and reward promptly.

Channel your child’s oppositional energy in positive ways

- Let them join a sports team to release energy and learn to work together.
- Involve them in community causes such as volunteer work to help save animals at a shelter.

Take care of you

Oppositional children can be exhausting
- Don’t hesitate to ask for help
- If a relative or friend offers to take them for awhile, accept and then do something that revives you
- If you are always stressed, your child will pick up on that feeling and tend to also be stressed. Stress may add to his or her acting out.

When they are happy, playing, and following your rules

- Enjoy them!
- Play with them and let them lead the play
- Take a moment to appreciate them
- Keep hopeful that with diligent work today, they may improve tomorrow