

Non-Compliance

It shouldn't come as a surprise that one of the most common points of struggle that parents come to discuss with me is when their children won't cooperate, when they're noncompliant, of so-called oppositional. There are so many things that I can say about this that I think it's better for you to look at the handout which identifies all the concepts and strategies I want to think about. But there are a few key things I want to say about helping noncompliant or resistant children. First of all, I really don't like this concept that the children are opposing us.

This so-called Oppositional Defiant Disorder really doesn't explain why children are behaving the way they are. Remember, children are a product of their genetics, their upbringing, and their environment, all of which we're pretty much involved in.

I prefer to think of oppositional or non-complaint behaviors as a lack of understanding and a lack of skill. I prefer to talk about the concepts of building cooperation and less so about the concepts involved in noncompliance. There are a few key things I want you to consider.

First, parents get caught up in the idea that children must cooperate and must cooperate now.

They don't take the bigger picture of building the cooperation over time. They get into a power struggle about expecting, demanding, battling for compliance when it's better to let it go for now and help your child learn a lesson later.

The second thing that parents do is they make the attribution that children are fighting them, opposing them, or being strong-willed. It's a negative characterization and that fuels our anger. I don't tend to look at it that way.

That noncompliant behavior is the reflection of something that we need to understand and address. Maybe your child's anxious, maybe your child's depressed, maybe your youngster's needing more attention. Maybe they are so stuck on their agenda that they have trouble with the flexibility that's required in being more compliant. Sometimes their noncompliance is reinforced. That is, we battle with our children and we let the issue go.

There are many, many reasons why children are oppositional or noncompliant. We have to understand those reasons. If we just look at the child as misbehaving we're not going to do a good job at gaining their cooperation.