

Responding to Noncompliance Handout

Reframe Your Thinking: I struggle with the notion of an oppositional or defiant child. While the diagnosis of Oppositional Defiant Disorder is commonly used, it does not really explain why a child is struggling. Remember that children reflect their genetics, upbringing, and environment; all elements that parents are a part of.

Do a Deeper Dive: When children are uncooperative, we need to ponder carefully the reasons why? Are they anxious or depressed, are they overscheduled, are they spoiled, are they obsessive and get stuck in their thinking, might they be tired, etc.? To label it as opposition or defiance should not preclude us from trying to understand what is going

Accept and Acknowledge the Barrier: Don't discount the reasons why a child is resistant. Showing an understanding of their view will increase the likelihood of cooperation

Avoid the Conversation. Parents respond to noncompliance with a predictable pattern of warnings and lectures that an uncooperative child has heard many times before. When your child is refusing to cooperate, talk less and stay calm. Avoid the information fallacy, explaining more does not lead to more cooperation (posting more speed limit signs will not lead to safer driving).

Stay Calm. Anger is an infectious emotion; the angrier you get the angrier your child will be. Although it is easier said than done, try and stay calm. Some parents find it helpful to credit themselves (a self-reward system) for staying calm when their children are noncompliant.

Use Threats Cautiously. Every parent has moments when they use threats to gain their child's cooperation. Although threats may be easy to use, children learn to cooperate only when threatened. When they cooperate under duress their attitude is negative, and their perspective is distorted. Beware of having to use threats too often.

Be Reasonable. Although children need to learn the importance of cooperation and respect for adult authority, the "do it because I say so" approach can be overused. If your child raises an appropriate point in a respectful way, then you should be prepared to discuss it. There is a difference between arguing and discussing an issue.

Use the Mantra. When children argue, try and stick to a simple statement that you repeat over and over, nothing more to be said (e.g., "You need to finish your math before you watch TV."). If you respond to a child's argument, then you are teaching him or her to respond to requests by negotiating.

Refer to the Rule. When children argue, refer to a family rule that has already been discussed and agreed upon. If parents are obligated to follow family rules and agreements, it is harder for children to convince them to change their mind.

Delay the Discussion. When children want to argue it helps to delay the discussion to a time that is more convenient to you and less convenient for your child. Rather than argue before bedtime, schedule the argument for your child's TV. time or story time or play time.

Parent Punishment. Some parents find it helpful to refer to consequences that the child will receive if they break the rules. It is harder for a child to pressure a parent if the parent refers to a punishment that the child will receive for giving in.

Is it Can't or Won't? Some children are uncooperative because they don't believe that they can do what you ask. They would rather be noncompliant than unsuccessful. Make sure that your requests are well within your child's ability.

Charge for Your Time. When children argue or waste your time, charge for it. You can use your watch or a timer to keep track of the amount of time being wasted. You can then require your son or daughter to pay you back the time with a chore or with a gift of time. Children who refuse to pay their parents back for the time wasted will have parents who are unwilling to extend themselves for their children (e.g., no ride to a friend's, no time to hand out allowance, not in the mood to help get on the Internet).

Use "Time Out." There comes a point when a child's noncompliance keeps you from "going about your business." If you cannot continue a phone call or enjoy your sandwich or do your paperwork because of your child's noncompliance, then a time out is appropriate. Whatever system for time out you use, make sure to require some "payback" or act of cooperation when your son or daughter has calmed down and the time out is over. If they refuse to make amends or cooperate for us, then the time out continues.

Reframe the Problem. One of the most interesting techniques for improving compliance is reframing. Instead of blaming the child, reframe the problem and provide a paradoxical consequence. Blame the media when children have trouble turning off the TV. and restrict TV's influence on your children. Take the blame when your children have trouble picking up their toys and offer to help pack the toys in storage.

Suggest Practice. Some children need to practice cooperating. For some youngsters, they can cooperate now or practice the same things 3 or 5 times later. Children who resist practicing, find that they cannot play with a friend or watch a show or share in a fun family activity until they practice.

"Just a Minute." When children say, "just a minute," they need to explain why they need a minute. If you accept their reasoning, then you should be willing to come back later and repeat the request.

Do It Yourself. When your child is uncooperative it sometimes is best to just do the chore yourself. Children will soon learn that there is a "charge" when parents do their child's work.

"Have It Your Way." Sometimes the best response to noncompliance is to walk away and let your child have it his or her way. Often the children will then choose to cooperate. There will be opportunities later to arrange a lesson about the importance of cooperation.

Model Consequences for Noncompliance. It really helps children to see that there are consequences for parents when they don't cooperate. Set up a situation where a spouse or older sibling does not cooperate. Your child may enjoy seeing someone else receiving a consequence for a change!