

Background

All children are oppositional from time to time, particularly when tired, hungry, stressed or upset. They may argue, talk back, disobey, and defy parents, teachers and other adults. Oppositional behavior is often a normal part of development for two to three year olds and early adolescents. However, openly uncooperative and hostile behavior becomes a serious concern when it is so frequent and consistent that it stands out when compared with other children of the same age and developmental level and when it affects the child's social, family and academic life.

A child presenting with ODD symptoms should have a comprehensive evaluation. It is important to look for other disorders that may be present such as ADHD, learning disabilities, mood disorders and anxiety disorders. It may be difficult to improve the symptoms of ODD without treating the coexisting disorder. Some children with ODD may go on to develop conduct disorder.

Treatment

Treatment of ODD may include a variety of therapies and techniques. Parent management training programs can be helpful to parents and others to learn to manage the child's behavior. Individual psychotherapy may be used to develop more effective anger management. Family psychotherapy is a strategy to improve communication and mutual understanding. Cognitive problem-solving skills training and therapies can be used to assist with problem solving and decrease negativity. Social skills training may increase flexibility and improve social skills.

Medication may be helpful in controlling some of the more distressing symptoms of ODD as well as the symptoms related to coexistent conditions such as ADHD, anxiety and mood disorders.

Symptoms of ODD can include:

- Frequent temper tantrums
- Excessive arguing with adults
- Often questioning rules
- Active defiance and refusal to comply with adult requests/rules
- Deliberate attempts to annoy or upset people
- Often being touchy or easily annoyed
- Blaming others for their mistakes or behavior
- Increased irritability, anger, or hostility
- Frequent anger and resentment
- Mean and hateful talking when upset
- Spiteful attitude and revenge seeking

A child with ODD can be very difficult for parents. These parents need support and understanding. Parents can help their child with ODD in the following ways:

- Always build on the positives, give the child praise and positive reinforcement when they show flexibility or cooperation.
- Take a time-out if you are about to make the conflict with your child worse. This is good modeling for your child.
- Pick your battles. Since the child with ODD has trouble avoiding power struggles, prioritize the things you want your child to do. For example, if you give your child a time-out for misbehavior, don't add time for arguing.
- Set up reasonable, age appropriate limits with consequences that can be reinforced consistently.
- Maintain interests other than your child with ODD, so that managing your child doesn't take all your time and energy. Try to work with and obtain support from the other adults dealing with your child.
- Manage your own stress with healthy life choices such as exercise and relaxation. Use respite care and other breaks as needed.