

A Family For Every Child Matching Assistance



*"We should not be asking who this child belongs to,
but who belongs to this child."*

Oppositional Defiant Disorder

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) is one of the more commonly diagnosed behavioral disorders in foster children. It is defined as a constant pattern of hostile, angry and verbally aggressive behaviors, typically aimed at caregivers and other authority figures in the child's life. The most common behaviors in a child diagnosed with ODD are negativity, defiance, spite, and verbal aggression. These behaviors can have an impact on a child's relationships, both at home and with their peers.



Causes of ODD

While there are no known exact causes of ODD, it is believed that psychological, social and biological factors all play a role.

Psychological Factors:

- Poor relationship with parent or caregiver; typically due to trauma, abuse or neglect
- Problems reading social cues and forming relationships

Social Factors:

- Poverty
- Trauma, abuse neglect; overall chaotic environment
- Instability within the family
- Lack of supervision or parental involvement

Biological Factors:

- One or both parents diagnosed with a behavioral disorder (ADHD, ODD, CD)
- One or both parents diagnosed with a mood disorder (depression, Bi-Polar)
- One or both parents have drug and/or alcohol abuse issues
- Prenatal exposure to cigarette smoke
- Exposure to environmental toxins

- Lack of proper nutrition

Based on the factors listed above, it is easy to see how children in foster care are often diagnosed with ODD. Understanding the potential causes of ODD will help you understand your child's behavior better and why they act the way they do. It's important to keep in mind that ODD can co-occur with other mental health and behavioral disorders, such as ADHD, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and learning disorders.



Treatments for ODD

Treatment for ODD will depend on the individual child. Many times, a combination of the below treatments will produce the best results. Consult your child's therapist to discuss the best treatment options for your child. The following are some of the common treatment options for ODD:

Parent Training Programs - Parents are taught how to manage a child's behaviors, reinforce positive behaviors, and use effective discipline techniques in Parent-Management Training classes. This is effective for pre-school, school-age and adolescent children.

Social-Skills Programs - Children and adolescents are taught how to relate to their peers in a positive way. This treatment is effective for school-age and adolescent children.

Problem-Solving Skills Programs - Children and adolescents are taught how to respond positively and appropriately to stressful situations. This is effective for school-age and adolescent children.

Medication - While not effective on its own, medication can be used alongside one of the above techniques to help a child or adolescent with co-existing symptoms of ODD, like ADHD, mood or anxiety disorders.

Individual therapy for a child has also proven effective. Treatment may last for several months or several years, depending on the child and the severity of their ODD. The prognosis for children diagnosed with ODD is good; many children improve over time. The keys to success include early intervention and utilization of treatment programs like the ones listed above.



How to Help Your Child On a Daily Basis

Professionals are not the only ones who can help your child overcome their diagnosis of ODD. Parents play a critical role in their child's treatment. The following are some strategies you can use in your home to help your child on a daily basis:

- **Reinforce positive behavior.** Recognize when your child has done something good, like making their bed without being asked. Simple phrases like "Thank you!" and

- "Great job!" go a long ways in reinforcing positive behavior.
- **Cool off.** When you and your child are both losing control of your emotions, it will only escalate the situation to the point of no return. If your child storms off, let them go. You should both take a "time-out" for a few minutes to calm down, and then get back together to talk. The conversation will be more productive when you are both in a calmer state of mind.
 - **Learn to pick your battles.** A child with ODD will always want to be in control, so it's important to avoid getting sucked into a power struggle over everything. There are no winners in that type of situation. Prioritize what you want your child to do, and decide what topics are truly worth engaging with your child in.
 - **Set age-appropriate limits.** Keep your child's developmental age in mind when doing so. Be consistent in reinforcing the rules and consequences when they are broken.
 - **Engage in some "you" time.** It is easy to get sucked into your child's world of ODD, appointments, school issues, etc. that you may feel like all of a sudden everything in your life is solely focused on your child. It's important for parents to practice self-care by aiming to do at least one thing a day that is just for them. Maintaining your interests will allow you to take a break and relax, which in turn will allow you to parent more effectively and be a better source of help and support for your child.
 - **Seek out help.** There is absolutely no shame in asking for help when you need it. Whether you need respite care or effective parenting strategies from your child's therapist, reach out to those in your support network.

The following are some strategies your child may employ themselves to help with their day-to-day behaviors:

- Have a calendar in their room or on the fridge that outlines their daily activities. For an older child, they could use a day planner. Children who have spent time in foster care thrive on consistency and knowing what is happening next, and knowing what activity is coming up next can help make for smoother transitions and less acting-out behaviors.
- Have a "quiet space". This is a place that only the child goes when he/she is feeling upset, angry or overwhelmed. Help your child identify some activities that calm them down, like reading a book, painting, listening to music, or doing a physical activity like playing basketball. Respect the child's quiet space, and their time in it.
- Encourage your child to be honest with their therapist about what is going on in their life and what is upsetting them. Have your child use a journal to write down their thoughts and feelings, and then bring it to their therapy sessions so they remember everything. Keeping a journal may be helpful overall, allowing your child an outlet for expressing their feelings in a positive way, rather than expressing them physically.
- Keep a goal chart, either in the child's room or somewhere they will see it every day. They could be daily, weekly or monthly goals, or perhaps goals they want to obtain sometime in the future. Reviewing these goals every week can help keep your child on track in school, at home, and in their social/family relationships.

Other ways you can help your child:

- **Build up their self-esteem.** When your child feels confident, they will be less likely to

react angrily at the first sign of conflict. This will also allow them to build positive peer relationships and improve school performance.

- **Tell them you care.** Your child may not be receptive to hearing you say "I love you" at first, especially if they just joined your family. Instead, let them know "you are loved" and back up your words with actions. As time goes on, you can start saying "I love you" as your child gets to know you better and becomes more comfortable in your home.
- **Spend time doing something they love.** By engaging with your child in an activity they love, you are showing them you care. Invite them to participate in something you enjoy, too. This will help them feel like they are part of your family.
- **Listen.** Most of the time children are just looking for someone to listen to their thoughts and feelings. Be there for them, and take what they have to say seriously. While you may think it's trivial, if you convey that message to your child they will shut down and not want to talk to you. They're not looking for criticism, comments, or even advice all the time; sometimes they just need someone to listen to them.
- **Be patient.** Your child's behaviors are learned over years of abuse, trauma or neglect. It is how they survived and they are engrained in their brain and body. They are not going to change overnight, or even in 6-months. It will take time, lots of patience, and persistence for your child to start making improvements in their behaviors. Recognize and celebrate the small victories; this will not only help keep your child motivated, it will help you as well.

Parenting a child with ODD is not easy. They will try your patience and test your boundaries. It's critical that parents do not engage in power struggles with their child, seek out help and treatment programs right away, and celebrate the small victories.



Additional Information and Resources

AACAP - [Oppositional Defiant Disorder: A Guide for Families](#)

AACAP - [Oppositional Defiant Disorder Resource Center](#)

Bair Foundation - [Tip Sheet: ODD](#)

Empowering Parents - [The Oppositional, Defiant Teen: How James Lehman tackles the toughest behavior disorder](#)

PSG CIP - [Foster Parent Training: Oppositional Defiant Disorder](#)

