

## Top 10 Discipline Tips for Kids with Oppositional Defiant Disorder

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Raising a child with oppositional defiant disorder can be extremely frustrating because you feel like everything is a constant battle. You just want your child to do his homework, pick up his toys, get dressed for school, etc. and you are constantly faced with refusal.

As a behavior specialist and school psychologist I have had many parents and teachers ask for advice on how to handle this kind of defiant behavior. In my training I learned a lot about positive behavior support strategies and have used them with my clients and students for the past 16 years, and now with my own son. I can tell you first hand that these strategies are extremely effective. They work when I use them and when I teach others how to use them with their children or students. Here I have summarized my top ten tips:

*FYI: These tips are effective for all kids, not just those with oppositional defiant disorder.*

1. 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.

Related Article: [25 Privileges You Can Let Your Child Earn for Good Behavior](#)

2. 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." Give some more reminders as the time is winding down (e.g., in two minutes it's time for dinner). A timer or visual timer can be helpful for children who don't have a concept of time.

Related Article: [How to Use Timers to Motivate Children](#)

3. Use empathetic statements to show your child you understand how he/she feels. Imagine how you would feel if someone came into your room and said "get off the computer and go to bed." Although they are kids and are expected to follow adults' rules, they still have the same feelings you would have in that type of situation. You can show them you understand how they feel with a statement such as "I know you are really enjoying your computer time and you don't want to turn it off, but you need to get rest for school tomorrow. You can have some time on the computer again tomorrow."

4. Phrase directives in the positive and remove the word "can." For example, instead of "stop jumping on the furniture" or "can you stop jumping on the furniture?" try something like "sit

down” or “come down off the couch” in a calm, but confident tone. **If possible** provide an alternative activity or redirect them to something they like to do like “let’s do jumping jacks together” or “here are some puzzles/blocks to play with.” Children respond much better when you tell them “what to do” rather than “what not to do.” Anything you want your child to stop, you can phrase in the positive by giving them a clear direction of what you want them to do. Giving an explanation such as “you can fall” or “that can damage the couch” is often helpful as well.

5. Use specific praise when your child follows your expectations or listens to your directions. Some examples include “excellent job picking up your toys,” “you were so focused during homework tonight,” “nice job listening to directions” etc.

6. Pick your battles. If your five year old is playing in the dirt and you find it disgusting, let him. As long as he is safe, not hurting or disrespecting himself or anyone else, and not damaging anything, try to give him as much freedom as possible.

7. Give your child choices whenever possible. Examples include, “Do you want to wear the green or red shirt?” “Do you want to do your math or reading homework first?” “Do you want to set the table or take out the garbage?”

8. Say what you mean and mean what you say. If you tell your child that he needs to pick up his toys before he can play outside, make sure you follow through on your rule and honor your end of the bargain. Stay away from empty threats (punishments that you will never follow through on). Your child will come to learn the value of your words. If you don’t mean what you say, he/she won’t take you seriously.

9. If possible, utilize a schedule with your child that builds in chores, homework (if applicable), self-help tasks (shower, brush teeth, etc.), and fun activities. Have your child participate in creating the schedule. Embed the fun activities into the schedule so that your child alternates between preferred and non-preferred activities. One part of the schedule needs to be complete before moving on to the next part. Also, keep in mind that children with idle time on their hands are looking for things to do, so structuring their time can alleviate some impulsive behaviors like running/jumping in the house.

Related Article: [How to Use Schedules to Promote Positive Behavior in Children](#)

10. Avoid arguing, long lectures, or sarcastic remarks about your child’s behavior.

Stick to your rules and don’t negotiate, go back and forth, or argue with your child. If your child starts to argue or tantrum after you have stated the rule and shown empathy, let him/her know that you are not going to discuss it anymore. Do not give attention to a temper tantrum. Once the tantrum is over, you can praise your child for calming down, provide empathy again if needed,

and listen if your child wants to talk about his/her feelings. Then direct your child back to the task he/she is expected to do.

If your child is acting unsafe, protect him/her and others from harm but do not try to negotiate with your child or give in to the tantrum in order to make it stop. This will only lead to more tantrums in the future. If you are ever concerned for the safety of your child or anyone else, contact the crisis center or emergency number in your area.

Related Article: [How to Prevent and Handle Temper Tantrums](#)

These are ten tips but there are several more. For more effective behavior strategies check out:

[How to Motivate Your Students and Get them to Listen to You \(great for parents too\)](#)

[17 Ways to Get Your Kids to Listen to You and Show You Respect](#)

[10 Simple Ways to Improve Children's Behavior \(Home and School\)](#)

[How to Use Timers to Motivate Children](#)

[How to Use Praise to Promote Positive Behavior in Kids](#)

[How to Prevent Tantrums by Changing the Way You Say No](#)

Recommended E-book (No Kindle Device Needed): [If I Have to Tell You One More Time...: The Revolutionary Program That Gets Your Kids To Listen Without Nagging, Reminding, or Yelling](#)