

## Facts

People with Oppositional Defiant Disorder display a pattern of negative, hostile and defiant behavior lasting for at least six months. The disturbance in behavior causes significant difficulty in social, academic, or occupational life. The disorder usually becomes evident before age 8 and not later than early adolescence, with symptoms usually appearing in the home setting, but over time appearing in other settings as well. People with this disorder do not see themselves as defiant, but justify their behavior as a response to unreasonable demands or circumstances. Over months or years, the disorder may progress to Conduct Disorder.

Oppositional defiant disorder is believed to affect between 2 and 16% of the population, depending on the nature of the population sample and how the data is obtained. The disorder is more common in males than females before puberty, but is probably equal after puberty. The symptoms are similar in each gender, with the exception that males are more confrontational and have more persistent symptoms.

## Signs & Symptoms

- Often loses temper
- Often argues with adults
- Often actively defies or refuses to comply with adults' requests or rules
- Often deliberately annoys people
- Often blames others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior
- Is often touchy or easily annoyed by others
- Is often angry and resentful
- Is often spiteful or vindictive

## Causes

The disorder appears to be more common in families in which at least one parent has a history of a mood disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, antisocial personality disorder, or a substance-related disorder. Also, some evidence

suggests that mothers with a depressive disorder are more likely to have children with oppositional behavior, but it is unclear whether the mother's depression results from or contributes to the child's behavior. The disorder is more common among families with severe marital problems.

## Treatment

Treatment options include: individual and family therapy, parent training in behavior management, and social skills and anger management training for the child.

## Helping Yourself

Finding ways to relax which work for you can be a key strategy in helping yourself. Here are a few things you can try:

- **Monitor your outlook.** Remember that the specific thing that triggers your anger isn't the only thing which causes angry feelings. When you get angry, ask yourself: Am I overreacting to this trigger? Am I directing my anger at an innocent person? Am I taking this personally? Am I just reacting the way I usually respond? Am I trying to take charge of my anger?
- **Breathing.** Consciously take several deep breaths, concentrating on each breath.
- **Relaxation** by body parts. Close your eyes, take several deep breaths, and consciously relax yourself, one body part at a time, beginning at your toes and working up until you have relaxed your entire body, including head and face. An alternative is to tense each body part for 15-20 seconds before relaxing it.
- **Imagine** a pleasant peaceful scene or favorite place. Concentrate on the details, colors, smells and sounds.
- **Massage.** Self-massage of face, neck and head is easy to do and is an instant stress reducer.
- Find a way to **express your feelings.** It may be to join a support group, start a diary or journal, or talk things over with a friend.
- **Exercise** is known to increase the body's morphine-like endorphins, while improving the brain's oxygen supply and releasing tension from the

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muscles.

- **Have a sense of humor.** Try to find the humor in minor troubles and annoyances.
- **Meditation,** yoga, listening to soothing music all are proven stress-reducing activities, as well as hot baths, warm showers, steam baths and saunas.
- **Try a hobby.** A hobby can be a productive outlet for tension and energy and a welcome distraction from angry feelings.

## Helping Someone Else

Family therapy can be helpful in increasing education and understanding among family members of a person with this disorder. Parents may also want to seek treatment focusing on behavioral management, communication, problem-solving, realistic expectations, etc. In addition, many parents have benefited from participating in a community support group.

If you are the parent or caregiver of a person with oppositional defiant disorder, it is important to take care of yourself and stay connected with your own support system, i.e., maintain and increase your network of friends, keep in regular contact with several trusted people, and participate in new activities.

In dealing with the day-to-day behaviors of the person with oppositional defiant disorder, don't answer anger with anger. It's important to try to understand why the person is angry by listening, maintaining eye contact, and not interrupting. Sometimes the person just needs to "vent," and the anger doesn't involve you personally. If you're trying to solve a conflict, wait until the person is calm and try talking through possible solutions together that you can both agree on. If a person is very angry and has a weapon, don't confront or try to restrain them. If you're worried about your safety, get away and get help.

- Always build on the positive, give the child praise and positive reinforcement when he shows flexibility or cooperation.
- Take a time-out or break if you are about to make the conflict with your child worse. This is good modeling for your child. Support your child if he decides to take a time-out to prevent overreacting.
- Pick your battles. Prioritize the things you want your child to do. If you give your child a time-out in his room for misbehavior, don't add time for arguing. Say "your time will start when you go to your room."
- Set up reasonable, age appropriate limits with consequences that can be enforced consistently.

*Sources:*

*Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition*  
*National Institute of Mental Health*  
*American Psychiatric Association*  
*National Alliance on Mental Illness*

## For more information contact

Northern Lakes Community Mental Health  
1-800-492-5742  
(231) 922-4850

National Alliance on Mental Illness  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)  
(800) 950-6264

National Institute of Mental Health  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)  
(800) 421-4211 (depression info)  
(888) 826-9438 (anxiety info)  
(301) 443-4513 (other info)

Mental Health America  
[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)  
(800) 969-6642

The Center for Mental Health Services  
[www.mentalhealth.org/cmhs/](http://www.mentalhealth.org/cmhs/)