May I Have This Dance? Effective Strategies for Oppositional Students

Sharon Blanchard, MS, LPC, Center for Learning & Development
May I Have This Dance?
Effective Interventions for Oppositional & Defiant Students

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Presented by: Sharon Blanchard MS, LPC

CENTER FOR LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT
200 W. HWY 6, SUITE 503
WACO, TX 76712
254-751-0922
FAX: 254-751-0547
E-MAIL: INFO@CLDTX.ORG
WWW.CLDTX.ORG

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What will we cover in this session?

✓ CHARACTERISTICS of OPPOSITIONAL STUDENTS

✓ TYPES of CONTROL

✓ CAUSATION

✓ The DANCE

✓ MAKING it WORSE and MAKING it BETTER?

✓ Your DANCE CARD

✓ RELATIONSHIPS

✓ INVITATIONS to DANCE
  ○ “You can’t make me!”
  ○ “This is stupid!”
  ○ “I don’t care!”

✓ DANCE a DIFFERENT DANCE

✓ CONFERENCING with the OPPOSITIONAL STUDENT
CHARACTERISTICS of OPPOSITIONAL STUDENTS

- These students possess a **strong need for control**...
  - They will do just about anything to gain or maintain this control.
  - Their theme song: “You’re not the boss of me.”
  - If an adult draws a line in the sand (about any kind of rule or limit), this student is the one who feels compelled to step across that line!

- They typically **deny responsibility** or blame.
  - They tend to believe that their behavior is reasonable.
  - They blame others for their own mistakes or misbehavior.
  - They have little insight into how they impact others.
  - In fact, they often feel they are “picked on.”

- They **tolerate** a great deal of **negativity**.
  - They seem to thrive on large amounts of conflict, anger and negativity from others, and are frequently the winners in escalating battles of negativity.

- They often exhibit **irritable moods**: even outside the “battle zones,” they often exhibit negative moods (they often are touchy, are easily annoyed, and deliberately annoy others).

- They may or may not be diagnosed with ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder).

TYPES of CONTROL

Physical control (most typical battle of the wills)

- “You can’t make me.” & “Just try to make me.”
  - Active defiance; questioning the rules; challenging rules they perceive to be unreasonable; refusal to follow rules
- “If you make me do this, I’ll get even.”
  - Vengefulness, spitefulness

Major theme: Winning often becomes the most important aspect of the struggle. Will often forfeit cherished privileges rather than lose the battle.

Cognitive control (probably the most FRUSTRATING battle of the wills):

- “The Great Debate”: Whatever you say, their response is: “That’s stupid.”
- Can escalate to: “You’re stupid.”

Major theme: “I’m right and you’re wrong.” They can argue all day long over what seems to be insignificant issues! In fact, these kids often pick the most trivial issues to become oppositional over.
Control, not the actual issue, is usually the crucial point. They can’t seem to back out of an argument – they can’t “let it go.”

Emotional control (the one we often don’t recognize as a control battle):

- “I don’t care.” & “Whatever.”

Major theme: “You cannot control my emotions, but I can sure control yours!”
Getting a reaction out of others (especially adults in charge) is the chief hobby. They like to see us get mad and/or flustered.
They seem to instinctively know when we are feeling most vulnerable and our energy is low. When this child finally pushes our buttons, in his mind, he has gained control of us and our emotions.
CAUSATION of OPPOSITIONALITY

Causation:
There is no clear-cut cause of oppositional behavior patterns. However, most experts believe that a combination of biological, temperament, psychological factors, and social factors play a role in the development of the disorder.

1. Biological Factors
Children and adolescents are more susceptible to developing oppositional behavior if they have:

- A parent with a history of:
  - ADHD, ODD, or CD
  - A mood disorder (such as depression or bipolar disorder)
  - A problem with drinking or substance abuse
- A mother who smoked during pregnancy
- Impairment in the part of the brain responsible for reasoning, judgment, and impulse control (especially frontal lobe)
- A brain-chemical imbalance
- Exposure to toxins

2. Temperament:
Many times strong-willed children are born with an inherited “temperament” that can make them difficult to parent.

Temperament is the inherited part of our personality – it’s how we are ‘wired’ when we’re born.

Kids usually fit into one of 3 categories:

- easy temperament (they’re SO EASY to parent!)
- slow-to-warm-up temperament (initially very shy, but eventually come around)
- difficult temperament (difficult to get on a routine, difficult to soothe, irritable, strong-willed)

3. Psychological Factors

- A poor relationship with one or more parent
- A neglectful or absent parent
• A difficulty or inability to form social relationships or process social cues

4. Social Factors

• Poverty
• Chaotic environment
• Abuse
• Neglect
• Lack of supervision
• Uninvolved parents
• Inconsistent discipline
• Family instability (such as divorce or frequent moves)

Adapted from: American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (website: www.aacadp.org); Chess & Thomas (1987); Parents Partner (http://www.parentspartner.com/strong-willed-child/).
The DANCE

Make it WORSE:

- Lose your temper (yelling and sarcasm never work).
- Talk for a long time or use long lectures.
- Engage in interaction in front of other students.
- Try to persuade the student – or bribe him.
- Threaten him.
- Add more consequences.
- Try to embarrass the student or put him down.
- Don’t follow through with consequences – or be inconsistent.
- Bring up the past.
- Let the dance go on way too long.
- Crowd him.
- Use negative body language.
- Get annoyed by every little thing he does wrong.
- Blame yourself or others.
- Make assumptions or label the student.

Make it BETTER:

- Use a calm, neutral voice – no matter what.
- Give clear directions and use short explanations (no more than 10 words).
- Discuss things briefly and privately.
- Make eye contact, control facial expressions, watch body language.
- Talk about what is happening right now.
- Focus on solutions, not problems.
- Ask questions, listen to his responses, and consider what he is saying.
- Have clear boundaries and predetermined consequences for behavior.
- Remove yourself from the dance if you are about to lose it.
- See the child as a complete person with strengths and weaknesses. (firm convictions, high spirited, a sense of adventure, bold, etc.)
- Analyze the dance...what invitation did you accept?
You Can't Make me!!

Start Positive!
- Set up positive interactions
- What’s important to the student?
- Beware... oppositional students are pretty savvy
- “Sneak” the positive stuff past them (see handout of Ways to Say “Good Job”)

You’ve decided to “say yes” (rather than ignore or side-step),
- Give 2 or 3 choices or options
- State the choices briefly and clearly.
  - “John, you can do the assignment at your seat or you can do it over here where it’s quiet, or you can take it home for homework. It’s your choice.”
  - “You can do the front side first or the back side first. Whichever you want.”
- Speak calmly and without emotion - like a broken record)
- Engage him in problem-solving:
  - “You can’t do this... but what else can we do?”
  - “Is there anything that we can work out together?”
- Ignore attempts to hook you into a power struggle. Ask again whether there is any way to resolve the situation. This response empowers them to make other healthy decisions.

If he refuses both of the choices, utilize consequences
- “If you don’t pick, I’ll assume you are choosing _______________”
- The plan regarding consequences must be mapped out ahead of time... not in the “heat of battle.”
- Focus on consequences that do not require cooperation of the child
  - if he won’t finish work: “okay... we’ll try again tomorrow” or loss of privileges/rewards
- Remove activities or privileges that are important to the student and allow him/her to earn the items back in response to acceptable behavior.
- Always give yourself “an out.”
  - “I’m not going to decide what’s best right now... I have to give it some thought.”
  - “I’m not sure the best way to handle this. I’ll get back with you when I’ve had time to think about it.”
- Stay calm - know you have a plan in case things go south in a hurry...

The “worst case scenario” - know what your options are when you get to the end of your rope
- If you find yourself drawn into the conflict (raising your voice, reprimanding him publicly, using sarcasm, etc.), work to immediately disengage yourself:
- Move away from the student - “Let me think for a minute and get back to you....”
- Repeat your request in a business-like voice,
- Impose a pre-determined consequence for noncompliance, etc.
- Turn to a team approach & don’t continue to “spin your wheels” through the efforts of one person.
This is Stupid!!

"The Great Debate" - and these kids can debate ANYTHING!

Most of these invitations to dance will need to side-step or ignore.

The ultimate plan here: give the student and yourself a way to make a graceful, "face saving" exit from the potential argument.

- Don't defend yourself.
  - Instead try something like:
    - "Why don't you check the research on it?"
    - "How about you teaching it from your perspective?" (no sarcasm)
    - OR: Change the subject.
- Walking away from the conflict is another strategy to consider, especially if your energy is low.
- Should he choose to escalate, it is time to use two powerful words which can cut through any argument.
  - "nevertheless"
  - "regardless"
  - For example, student says, "You're a terrible teacher."
    - "You may think that; nevertheless, you need to complete the assignment..."
    - "While you may feel that way.... regardless, you need to complete the assignment..."
  - Then, move away.

I Don't Care!!

The real message here is: "I don't care and you can't make me care."
"You can't control my emotions, but I sure can control yours."

Most of these invitations we want to side-step or ignore...

- When student's emotions are neutral or positive, you should be positive and engaging.
- When student's emotions are negative, you should be neutral and business-like.

Refuse to dance:

- Take the battle out of the discussion.
  - Student: "I don't care."
  - Teacher: "Okay, but hypothetically, what if you did care... what would that look like?"
• Attempt to distract. “We know that we think a lot better when we are “hydrated”.... so go get a quick drink of water...”

• Be proactive when you see that he is about to lose emotional control:
  o listen to their WORDS, not how they say it -- helps us keep ourselves calm and helps us focus on what the student is really saying
  o ask if a calming down period would help ... but don’t force it on him/her.
    • Consider establishing an isolated “calming down” place in the classroom
    • Be sure to make cool-down breaks available to all students so you don’t single out only those with control issues.

Offer to talk the situation over once he has calmed down.

• Help him learn to put his angry feelings into words – help him label the emotions, especially frustration, discouragement, and “What’s the use?” kinds of emotions.
  o “It seems like you might be a little frustrated (agitated, nervous, upset, kind of down, angry, embarrassed).”
  o Ask him to help you understand what’s going on emotionally... what’s causing the problem.
    • “What did I do that made you want to say that?”
    • “Am I doing something to be disrespectful? What can I fix?”
    • “What can I do to help your day go better?”

• The goal here is for him to be able to say things like: “I don’t understand this work.”
  “I don’t get this.” “This feels like too much work.”

It’s critical to establish a positive relationship... “away from the dance floor.”

• Recognize that the child is not the problem. The problem is the problem.
• Take positive steps to engage the student. For example: greet the student daily at the classroom door.
• Get to know the “non-oppositional” side of his personality and his life. It’s hard to continue thinking of a kid as “impossible” when you know his underlying story.
• Don’t start the dance! Avoid making comments or bringing up situations that may be a source of argument for them.
• Don’t take his behavior personally.
  o Remember, you are the outlet and not the cause for the defiance- unless you are shouting, arguing or attempting to handle the student with sarcasm.
  o Also remember that the oppositional child may well respond better to some teachers than others – don’t take this personally – it’s not about you, it’s about doing what’s best for the child.
Ways to Engage in Conversation with Difficult Students

To open the conversation:

- How are things going for you?
- How have you been? How are you doing today?
- What would you like to discuss?
- Tell me your story.
- Give me some background information.
- Describe what’s going on.
- Bring me up to date.
- Tell me what has changed since we last talked.

To find out their motive, goal, or what they are wanting:

- What do you want to happen? Or what are you wanting in this situation?
- How would you like for it to be? Or how would you like for it to be different?
- If it were exactly the way you want it, what would that be?
- Where are you going from here? What’s your next move?
- Where is this taking you?
- What is missing for you? What do you want that you are not getting?
- What do you want the result to be?
- What do you prefer?
- What is your motive?
- What do you long for? What have you hoped for?

To evaluate their wants and/or behavior:

- How important is that to you? On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rank that?
- How far do you want to take this?
- Have you thought about the costs? What is the risk? Is it worth pursuing?
- Is it getting you what you want?
- How is that working for you? Is your situation getting better? Or worse?
- What is the best thing that could happen? What’s the worst thing that could happen?
- Who can help you? How can I help you?
- Will that reduce the pain? Be easier? Be more difficult?
- Is that realistic? Would that be a compromise?
- Do you see that as a wise thing to do?
- Will that be enough? Will you be satisfied?
- How committed are you to that?

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## A Positive Twist

### When a Student: | They might:
--- | ---
Is bossy | have leadership qualities
Interrupts | be eager to share information or participate
Tattletales | be observant and concerned about others
Refuses to talk | be reserved or an independent worker
Is out of their seat | be active – or have lots of energy
Throws things | have good aim
Messy or unorganized | have creative storage solutions
Annoying | be comfortable meeting new people
Uncooperative | have a unique approach to learning
Fights | be confident or know what they want
Is unprepared or does not have supplies | be able to travel light
Ignores instructions | be focused

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### When all else fails – keep twisting!!!

### They might:

| | |
---|---|
Be a great napper | Always have matching socks | Be skilled at parting their hair
Be an efficient breather | Be a talented gum chewer | Keep their notebook paper clean
Be fashion conscious | Be a skilled pencil sharpener | Enjoy recess

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Choice Words

As educators, we recognize the importance of providing specific, relevant feedback, but we can take it a step further to impact the success of our students. According to Peter H. Johnston, author of *Choice Words: How our language affects children’s learning*, teachers can modify the language they use in providing feedback and encouragement to students to create literacy and strategic thinking.

For example, when students are praised for being “smart,” they tend to give up on challenging tasks because they have come to believe that learning should be easy. When effort and persistence are recognized, students persevere and maintain focus because they believe their efforts will gain results.

### Rather than Say

| “Good job!” | “You figured that out. Feels good, doesn’t it? Tell me how you did it.” or “Explain why you chose to go about it that way?” |
| “I’m proud of you.” | “I bet you’re proud of yourself!” |
| “Good contribution to your group.” | “Devon, your group tells me that you were very helpful in figuring out the answer to the problem.” |
| “What do you know about the Civil War?” | “How are you thinking like a historian today?” |
| “Strong opening to your essay.” | “Your opening line reminds me of one thing that other authors do. As a reader, I enjoy openings with a startling statement and you really captured that here.” |
| “Creative problem solving.” | “There are so many ways to solve this problem, and I see that you solved it two different ways. I know that mathematicians often solve problems several different ways to check their findings. I bet it was fun to see it work out both ways.” |
| “You’re almost done.” | “What might you do/try next?” |
| “Way to go!” | “You did it, but tell me how. I’m particularly interested in what was and was not helpful.” |

Words to Make it Work in the Classroom

Make It Positive

+ “I need you to work on your assignment
+ “Feel free to talk, as soon as your work is in my basket.”
+ “Feel free to sharpen your pencil, a soon as I have finished with directions.”
+ “Feel free to leave, as soon as your area is cleaned up.”
+ “I listen to people who raise their hands.”
+ “I grade papers before Christmas that are turned in on time. I grade late papers after Christmas.”
+ “I dismiss classes that are quiet.”
+ “I dismiss students whose areas are clean.”
+ “Thank you for being seated.”
+ “I will be over to help you on the assignment just as soon as you return to your seat.”

Distract

✎ “Students learn better when they are hydrated. Why don’t you go get a drink of water?”
✎ “Did you know I won a fishing pole?”
✎ “I need for you to run an errand for me.”
✎ It’s on the STAAR test. I know you want to graduate. Just bare with me today and we’ll do something different tomorrow.”
✎ “How about a peppermint? Would you like a peppermint? It’s good for lots and lots of things...”

Stall for Time

✎ “I don’t like to make decisions when I am upset. I’ll wait until I’ve calmed down before I decide what will help us both.”
✎ “I’m not sure how I want to handle this. I’ll get back with you when I’ve had time to think about it.”
✎ “If this continues, I’m not sure what I will do.”
✎ “And what are you supposed to be doing?”
Choices

leftrightarrow "What would be best for you? To _______ or to _____?"
leftrightarrow "Would you rather ____________ or ________________?"
leftrightarrow "Do you want to sit on the floor or in your chairs while I read?"
leftrightarrow "Do you all want to do social studies or math first?"
leftrightarrow "But what if you did care? What would that look like?"
leftrightarrow "So, what can we do about that?"

Save Face

😊 "I'm not sure about #3...I can't remember the answer for sure. You better double check it."
😊 "I'm not sure who's talking, but I need everyone focused on the task at hand. Thanks."

Remain Calm

🔹 "Nevertheless......."
🔹 "Regardless......."
🔹 "However........."
🔹 "What am I doing to upset you?"
🔹 "Have I disrespected you in some way?"
🔹 "Can you tell me what is upsetting you?"
🔹 "What can I do to make your day go better?"
🔹 "I love you too much to argue."
CONFERENCING with the OPPOSITIONAL STUDENT

The most effective?
Social competence training – emotional skills, behavioral skills, and social skills

Goals?
- Teach students to understand, express, and control their feelings (communication, anger control, dealing with stress)
- Reduce aggressive and antisocial behaviors (hitting, teasing, noncompliance)
- Develop prosocial skills (cooperativeness, sharing, conversing)

Methods?
- Verbal instruction
- Games
- Bibliotherapy, Narrative Therapy, and Workbooks
- Curriculum
- Modeling
- Role playing
- Continued coaching and discussion regarding acquisition of the skills
- Reinforcement of the skills in the natural environment
- Homework that supports the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional assimilation of skills

Focus:
- Provide conversation that is nonjudgmental, showing curiosity and concern rather than confrontation and challenge.
- Highlight current cognition related to the persistence of the problem rather than the problem’s origin.
- Discover ways that the student can have control and recognize the control that he has.
- Are there any other issues? Anxiety, depression, ADHD, social conflicts, family issues.
- The more secure the relationship, the less often the child will try to test its boundaries.

Consider these roles:
- Leader or co-leader of a small group
- Caretaker of a class pet
- Tutor or read-aloud partner for peers or younger students
- Buddy, lunch pal, or assistant for a younger student or new student
- Conflict mediator to help solve problems
- Create and/or lead a service project
- Construct something for the whole class to use
Conversations with Caregivers

Many times educators and professionals serving youth are reluctant to call caregivers because they aren’t sure what to say or how to say it. Maybe this reluctance is attributed to a negative past encounter or a lack of experience. Regardless of the reason, conversations with caregivers don’t have to be a dreaded chore – they can actually be an encouraging experience.

Make the first contact a positive one. This means that you need to act early! If you only have 30 or less students or youth, contact each caregiver within the first few weeks of your first encounter with the youth. If you have more than 30 students, at least contact the homes of the students for whom you can already tell you may need support. This establishes a positive relationship and a collaborative bond between you and the caregiver.

“I want to start the year right” positive first phone call script:
(document all phone calls and be sure to take notes for future reference)

Hello Mr/Ms __________, this is __________, __________ (subject/class) teacher from __________. I just wanted to introduce myself and let you know how excited I am to have __________ in my class this year (semester). I’ve only known him/her for a short time, so I am wondering if you can tell me a little about him/her.

(You may want to ask a few of these questions)

- What are his/her favorite things to do outside of school?
- What does he/she like most about school? What does he/she like least?
- What can I expect from (student’s name) ___ in the classroom?
- Does your child struggle in any particular subject? Or is there anything that’s really difficult for him/her in school?
- Is there anything special that I need to know about (student’s name)?
- What are your concerns/desires for (student’s name) ___?

Thank you so much for taking time to share this information with me. This will be so helpful. I’m looking forward to working with him/her. If I need to contact you in the future, would you rather me call or email or is there another way you prefer?
“When I have a concern” phone call script: (document all phone calls and be sure to take notes for future reference)

Hello Mr/Ms __________, this is __________, __________ (subject/class)

teacher from __________. I just wanted to touch base with you. I have a concern

about __________. Recently I’ve noticed a change in his/her:

- Work habits (grades, quality, incomplete)
- Attendance
- Behavior (in class, with peers)
- Attitude (toward work, peers, or adults)
- Attention/focus

** Remember that you want to convey concern and not come across as accusatory. You want the parent on your team, so enlist their help rather than putting them on the defensive.

Use phrases/questions like:
- “Have you noticed any changes with him/her?”
- “Has he/she confided in you about anything at school that could be troubling them? Maybe I can help.”
- “You know him/her better than I do. Can you help me understand what might be happening to cause this change?”
- “Do you have any suggestions of how I can help make this situation better?”

Thank you so much for taking time to talk with me about these concerns. I really want us to work together in helping __________. If you think of anything else that I need to know, please contact me by (phone, email, conference).

“When I have to leave a voicemail about a concern” script: (document all phone calls and be sure to take notes for future reference)

Hello Mr/Ms __________, this is __________, __________ (subject/class)

teacher from __________. I just wanted to touch base with you. Can you please call me back at __________? Thank you so much.

*** DO NOT leave a concerned or negative message as a voicemail!!

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When talking with an angry or upset caregiver, it's important to remember that the same tactics are used for adults as with students. Don't take it personally - YOU are not the cause. You may be the target, but the cause of the anger or discontent more than likely stems from frustration, anxiety, or a sense of lack of control. Caregivers want to protect their young — and sometimes act on misinformation, misperceptions, or a lack of control in an unrelated area of their lives such as a death in the family, or divorce.

** Remember that you want to convey concern and not come across as accusatory. You want the parent on your team, so enlist their help rather than putting them on the defensive.

Responding to a concerned/angry caregiver script: (document all phone calls and be sure to take notes for future reference)

Give the caregiver and ample opportunity to express his/her concerns without interruption – let them vent.

Once they have expressed their concern(s), possible responses may be:
- “I'm so glad you shared this with me so that I can take action.”
- “I can see that this is very upsetting to you.’
- “I really want to talk with you about this situation further, but I am with a class right now. Can I call you back when we can have more time to talk?” (this will give you some time to think before responding)
- “Can I have some time to think about some solutions and then I can call you back later today or tomorrow?”
- “How would you suggest that I handle this situation?”
- “I am open to suggestions. I'm not sure what would be the best solution.”
- “I can take your suggestion to the principal and see how he/she wants to handle this.” (especially if the requests are unreasonable or inappropriate)

Thank you so much for taking time to talk with me about these concerns. I really want us to work together in helping ____________. If you think of anything else that I need to know, please contact me by (phone, email, conference).

If the parent continues the rant (yelling, cussing, etc.) after your initial response, say:

“It's obvious that we are not accomplishing anything right now. Let's talk about this at a later time.”
Helpful Websites: Research and Interventions

Intervention Central
www.interventioncentral.org

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
www.aacap.org

NASP online (National Association of School Psychologists)
www.nasponline.org

What Works Clearinghouse
ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc

Do 2 Learn
www.do2learn.com

Education World
www.educationworld.com

Once Upon a First Grade Adventure
onceuponafirstgradeadventure.blogspot.com/2011/07/classroom-management-freebies.html

Free Printable Behavior Charts
www.freeprintablebehaviorcharts.com

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
www.pbis.org

Edutopia
www.edutopia.org