



Children are defiant for a reason, and if this behavior isn't managed early on, it can turn into a parent's worst nightmare. Mighty Mommy has 8 strategies to handle a defiant child before you lose your patience (and your mind).

When a child acts out and demonstrates defiant behavior, there is usually a reason behind it. Whether it's just looking for attention, testing boundaries, or frustration about school or social life, taking the time to understand why your child is acting out is often a big part of the solution.

There are circumstances, however, when this behavior is the result of a more serious condition known as Oppositional Defiance Disorder, or another more significant emotional issue. But in the absence of these, more serious ailments, the average child will most definitely test your limits while growing up.

The following strategies have helped me with my own brood. And it's not a coincidence that there are 8 strategies here – one for each of my 8 kids!

By following these techniques, you too can survive these maddening moments of defiance:

Strategy #1: Hold Your Child Accountable

Children of all ages need to know the family rules for everything from [helping out with chores](#), to completing [homework](#), to bedtime and curfews, to acceptable behavior toward others. The time to discuss these matters is when things are going well, not after an incident has occurred. Sit down with your kids and let them know what types of behaviors you will not tolerate in your family. List examples of unacceptable behaviors such as treating others with disrespect, being fresh or rude, name calling, refusing to do chores or homework, mistreating possessions, hitting, biting, or any other physical aggression.

You cannot expect your child, regardless of age, to be compliant if he doesn't know your expectations. Holding your child accountable does not result in a child who is obedient 100% of the time, but it does mean that you set the limits, and you provide a consequence when your child decides to break the rules—period! The goal is not to prevent your child from ever breaking the rules but to teach him, preferably at a young age, that when rules are broken consequences follow.

Strategy #2: Choose Your Battles

Parenting is exhausting enough when things are going well, but when one of your children is purposefully misbehaving, the difficulties are multiplied. So choose how you spend your energy wisely! For instance, if your high schooler wants to wear pants that are too big because that's the style, do you really need to start the day off on a negative note by hassling him over poor fashion choices?

On the other hand, if he tells you that he isn't going to school because he doesn't feel like it—that's just not going to fly. One of the most important lessons I've learned in my 18 years of parenting is that you can't change your child unless you change your attitude first, which brings us to Strategy #3...

Strategy #3: Act, Don't React



When you witness defiant behavior from your child, don't get angry and lose your temper. Instead, take a step back and calmly tell your child that you don't approve of the behavior and that you will handle it at a later time. This will raise a sense of fear in your child's mind because he'll have time to think about the poor actions and the potential consequences. Not only are you using the time to calm yourself down, but you're also teaching your kids how to do the same.

Strategy #4: Enforce Age-Appropriate Consequences

Effective consequences can largely be grouped into two categories: removals and impositions. A "removal" is taking something away from the child, such as your attention, an exciting environment, or a pleasant activity. The most well-known and widely-used removal is a time out. Other effective removals are: Grounding your child from social activities, taking away electronics for a certain period of time, immediately leaving the park, a friend's house, or a family party when a defiant behavior occurs.

"Impositions" are consequences that impose a new situation upon the child. Paying his own money into a family "fine" jar, doing extra chores, having to run errands with mom because he abused the privilege to stay home alone by inviting friends over without permission—these are impositions. Without question, effective strategies for consequences require a lot of time and energy to enforce. But if you don't follow through with consequences for bad behavior, you send the message: If you wear me down, you'll get your way. Bad idea!

We took the time to write our rules and their respective consequences on a poster board which we have framed and hanging in our home. This way, there's never a question as to our expectations.

Strategy #5: Keep Your Power

When you engage in an argument with your child, you're just giving them more power over the situation. In effect, you're enforcing the child's perception that they have the power to challenge you, which can lead to even more defiant behavior. The next time your child tries to draw you into a power struggle over something just say, "We've discussed what is going to happen if you do this. I don't want to talk about it anymore," and leave the room. When you leave, you take all the power with you. Know that the more you engage your child in an argument, the more control you're giving away.

Strategy #6: No Second Chances or Bargaining

Consistency is key if you don't want to reinforce bad habits. Once your child is old enough to understand that behaviors have consequences, don't give him repeat chances. This just teaches him that you aren't serious and he can get away with this behavior a few more times because he knows you won't take your own rules seriously.

If your son calls his friend's mother a "fat butt" when you arrive for a play date, you firmly say "You know we don't talk like that. We're going home now so you can spend some time thinking about what you said," and leave immediately after he apologizes. Do not bargain with your child, don't offer ice cream or money in return

for better behavior. This is possibly the most damaging thing a parent or caregiver can do. You are only enabling the poor behavior and can count on much worse in the future because they're going to see how far they can push you before you strike another bargain.

Strategy # 7: Always Build on the Positive



Make sure that you build on the positive attitudes and actions of your children. Praise your children for their positive behaviors, while rewarding them when they show a cooperative attitude. Positive reinforcement can go a long way in raising a responsible child.

Strategy #8: Set Regular Times to Talk to Your Child

In a moment of downtime, when things are going well and you don't anticipate an immediate power struggle, sit down with your child and let her know that you take your job as her parent very seriously and your intentions are to keep her safe and help her grow into a responsible, productive, self-reliant adult who will be as happy and fulfilled in life as possible. Remind her that your family has rules and values that are in place for her future, not to cause her grief while growing up.

Do you have a defiant child? How are you handling his/her behavior? Let me know in Comments or post it on the [Mighty Mommy Facebook](#) page. You can also connect with me on Twitter [@MightyMommy](#) or e-mail me at mommy@quickanddirtytips.com.

Check back next week for more [Mighty Mommy](#) tips. Don't forget to check out my family-friendly boards at [Pinterest.com](#). I hope you have an easygoing week and as always—Happy Parenting!

[Mother talking with Daughter](#), [Angry Girl](#) and [Mother Praising Son](#) images courtesy of Shutterstock