

Oppositional, Defiant, and Anger Issues: Promoting Positive Behaviour to Empower Children and Adolescents

Day 1-Presented by Dr. Eboni Webb, Psy.D., HSP



1

Day 1 Agenda – Understanding ODD

1. Defining Oppositional and Defiant Behavior
2. Exploring the root causes: psychological, environmental, cultural
3. Behaviorism, trauma, and mislabeling
4. Cultural disruptors and digital influences

• **Reflection: What shifts when we see behavior as communication?**

2

Learning Objectives – Day 1

By the end of today, participants will be able to:

- Identify psychological, biological, and environmental factors linked to ODD
- Recognize the influence of trauma, culture, and systems on defiant behavior
- Distinguish developmentally typical resistance from clinical patterns
- Reflect on how implicit bias and digital environments shape behavior

3

Working Together Today

1. We honor lived experience and professional insight
2. All behavior is communication — in youth and adults
3. Challenge ideas, not people
4. Confidentiality: What's shared in discussion stays in the room
5. Growth > perfection

4

Menti Poll:
What comes to mind when
you hear "defiance"?

Instructions:

1. Go to
<https://www.menti.com/alu9an47a786>
2. Enter the code: 3462 2382
3. Submit 1–3 words or phrases
that you associate with
"defiance"



5

What Are We Really Feeling About Defiance?

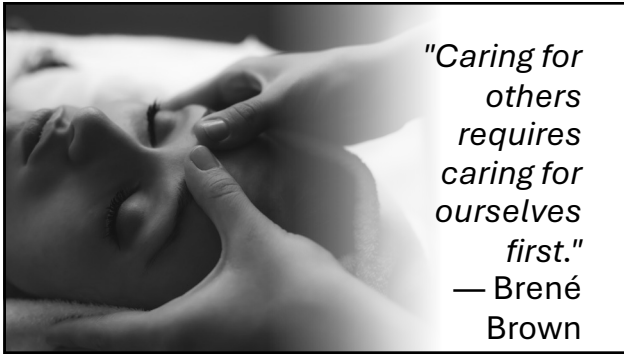
Common words often include:

resistance, disrespect, attitude, fear, protection, control

Let's notice:

- Are your words negative or curious?
- Do they describe **the child** or **your experience of the child**?

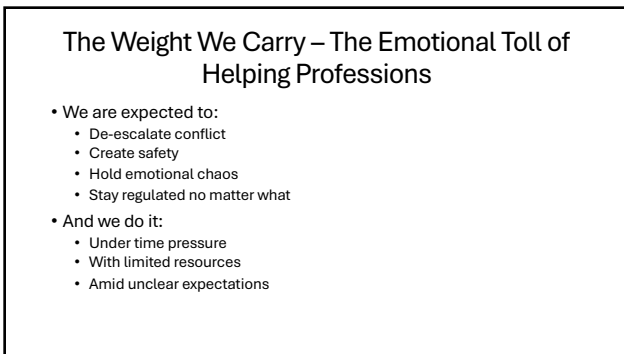
6



7



8



9

The Weight We Carry: Stress in the Helping Professions

60% of Canadian educators
report moderate to high burnout
symptoms (CTF, 2022)

Compassion fatigue is common
among teachers, therapists, and
helpers

Regulation is contagious: calm
breeds calm; chaos breeds
chaos

10

What We Carry Isn't Just Our Own

Compassion fatigue = depletion from sustained exposure to
others' emotional suffering

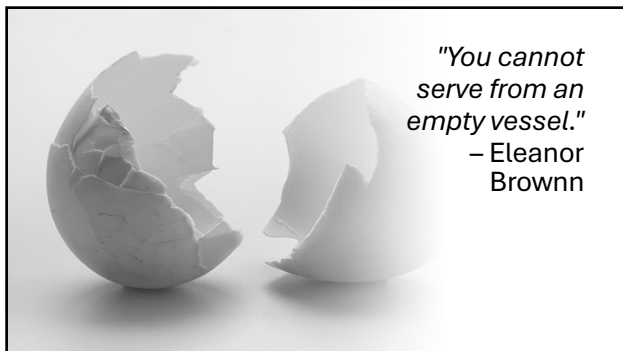
Secondary trauma = internalizing the pain of those we serve

Burnout = chronic system stress without repair

Signs include:

- Irritability or emotional numbness
- Feeling hopeless or ineffective
- Emotional withdrawal at work or home

11



*"You cannot
serve from an
empty vessel."*
– Eleanor
Brownn

12

Quick Write: How Does Defiance Affect You?

Take 2 minutes to reflect:

- What emotions does defiance stir up in you?
- Where do you feel it in your body?
- Do you tend to respond with control, shutdown, or curiosity?
- This is just for you — no sharing required.

13

Menti Poll: What's the hardest part of working with oppositional behavior?"

Instructions:

1. Go to <https://www.menti.com/alu9an47a786>
2. Enter the code: 3462 2382
3. Answer the poll: What's the hardest part of working with oppositional behavior?"



14

What Are We Holding?

Common responses often include:

- Power struggles
- Feeling ineffective
- Emotional shutdown
- Judgment from others

Reminder:

- Your reaction is shaped by your history — and it's valid

15

What Is ODD?

Understanding the Diagnosis Beyond the Label

16

What is Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)?

Persistent pattern lasting at least 6 months

Angry/Irritable Mood:

- Frequently loses temper
- Easily annoyed or resentful

Argumentative/Defiant Behavior:

- Actively defies or refuses authority
- Deliberately annoys others

Vindictiveness:

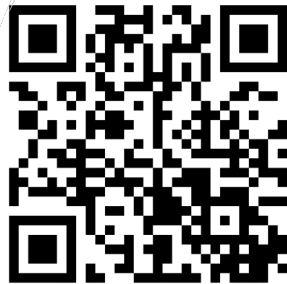
- Spiteful or vindictive behavior (at least twice in 6 months)
- Must cause significant impairment at school, home, or in relationships

17

Menti Poll: How confident are you in recognizing clinical-level defiance?

Instructions:

1. Go to <https://www.menti.com/alu9an47a786>
2. Enter the code: 3462 2382
3. Answer the poll: "How confident do you feel recognizing clinical oppositional behavior?"



18

ODD Across Borders: U.S. and Canada Comparisons

Prevalence:

- U.S.: 3–5% of children and adolescents
- Canada: ~2% of children and adolescents (Public Safety Canada, 2017)

Access to Services:

- U.S.: Fragmented access, insurance-based barriers
- Canada: Universal healthcare, longer waitlists especially in rural areas

Systemic Bias:

- Disproportionate over-discipline of racialized youth in both countries
- Black, Indigenous, and immigrant youth face additional diagnostic biases

19

Psychological Roots of Defiance

- **Temperament:** naturally intense or highly reactive children may struggle with regulation
- **Low frustration tolerance:** difficulty managing limits, transitions, or unexpected outcomes
- **Cognitive rigidity:** black-and-white thinking, difficulty with compromise
- **Early signs often mistaken for “attitude” rather than developmental vulnerability**

20

Environmental Contributors to Oppositional Behavior

- **Inconsistent parenting or discipline**
- **Exposure to family conflict, substance use, or mental illness**
- **Chaotic or unpredictable home routines**
- **Over-permissiveness followed by sudden control**
- These environments teach survival through **testing, controlling, or resisting** adults

21

Biological Influences on Defiant Behavior

Prenatal exposure to substances or high maternal stress

Traumatic brain injury or seizure disorders

Neurodevelopmental differences: e.g., ADHD, sensory dysregulation

- These biological factors impact **emotional regulation and impulse control**

22

Cultural and Systemic Roots of Defiance

Cultural mismatch between home values and institutional expectations

Experiences of racism, marginalization, or immigration stress

Over-surveillance in schools or child welfare involvement

- Defiance may reflect **cultural survival**, not behavioral disorder

23

Take a Break

We'll resume shortly



24

Trauma, Behavior, and What We Miss

"Not every defiant child is dangerous. But many are hurting."

25

The Hidden Forces Behind Defiance

Behavior is a language — it reveals, it protects, it survives

What looks like disrespect may be hypervigilance

What looks like avoidance may be freeze or collapse

- What looks like manipulation may be a trauma-adapted survival strategy

26

Trauma and the Family System: Hidden Forces Behind Defiance

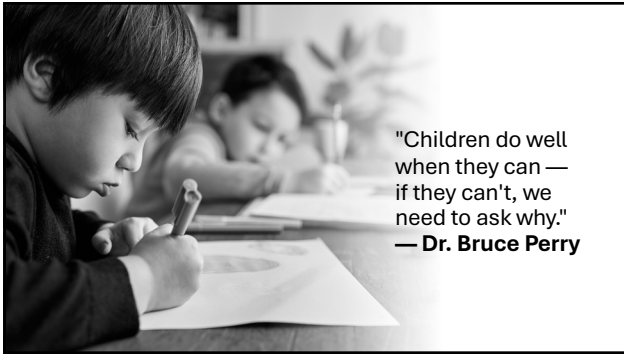
Trauma reorganizes family roles and emotional responses

1. **Loyalty binds:** Youth protect hurting parents by resisting other authority figures
2. **Emotional cutoff:** Youth detach to protect themselves from overwhelming emotions

Defiance often serves as survival behavior, not simply misbehavior

1. Healing must involve relational repair, not just individual behavior change

27



"Children do well when they can — if they can't, we need to ask why."
— Dr. Bruce Perry

28

Behaviorism Basics: Reinforcement and Punishment

Type of Consequence	What It Does	Example
Positive Reinforcement	Adds something good to increase behavior	Praise for completing homework
Negative Reinforcement	Removes something unpleasant to increase behavior	No chores if homework is finished
Positive Punishment	Adds something unpleasant to decrease behavior	Extra homework for disruptive behavior
Negative Punishment	Removes something pleasant to decrease behavior	Loss of recess after rule-breaking

29

Negative Reinforcement – When Control Gets Reinforced

Definition: Removing something aversive to increase behavior

In practice:

- Child refuses → adult backs off → child feels in control

Pattern forms:

- The louder I push back, the faster adults leave me alone

30

When Negative Reinforcement Strengthens Defiance

Common scenario:

- Child escalates (tantrums, argues) →
- Adult withdraws demand →
- Child learns escalation *works* to avoid tasks

Result:

- Short-term relief → Long-term increase in defiant behavior

Cycle:

- Emotional discomfort avoided → Behavior reinforced → Problem intensifies

31

Real-World Example: Negative Reinforcement in Action

Scenario:

- Child yells and throws a tantrum when asked to clean their room.
- Parent feels overwhelmed and says, "Fine, I'll just do it myself."

Immediate Effect:

- Conflict ends temporarily.
- Both child and parent feel short-term emotional relief.

Long-Term Impact:

- Child learns escalation is effective.
- Defiance and tantrums increase over time when demands are made.

32

Case Example: Mateo at Home

Mateo, age 9, refuses to brush his teeth

Mom yells, threatens consequences

Mateo screams, throws the toothbrush

Mom walks away to calm down

- The behavior that was reinforced: **noncompliance**

33

Real-World Example: Negative Reinforcement in the Classroom

Scenario:

- Student disrupts during independent work time (talks loudly, refuses tasks).
- Teacher, trying to keep the class moving, sends the student to the hallway.

Immediate Effect:

- Classroom is quiet.
- Teacher and classmates feel immediate relief.

Long-Term Impact:

- Student learns disruptive behavior = escape from difficult or unpleasant tasks.
- Disruptive behavior becomes more frequent over time.

34

Case Example: Aisha at School

Aisha, age 12, is asked to read aloud

She says “no” loudly and slouches in her seat

The teacher avoids confrontation and moves on

- Aisha avoids exposure, and the refusal is reinforced

35

Why Positive Punishment Often Fails with Oppositional Youth

Positive punishment = adding unpleasant consequences to reduce behavior

Common methods:

- Extra homework
 - Detention
- Verbal reprimands

Risks with oppositional youth:

- Increases shame and anger
- Fuels power struggles and defiance
- Triggers trauma responses rather than learning

36

Why Punishment Fails with Traumatized Youth

- Creates fear without teaching regulation
- Increases shame, which fuels reactivity
- Erodes trust and increases power struggles
 - Short-term compliance, long-term disconnection

37

Using Negative Punishment Carefully with Oppositional Youth

Negative punishment = removing something desirable to decrease behavior

To be effective, consequences must be:

1. **Immediate** — Close to the behavior
2. **Predictable** — Explained ahead of time
3. **Proportionate** — Logical, not excessive
4. **Repairable** — Youth knows how to regain privileges
5. **Always paired with emotional coaching, not isolation**

38

Can We Ever Use It? Only With Structure and Repair

- Use it intentionally, not emotionally
- Pair with skill-building and co-regulation
- Follow up with connection: "Let's try again together"
 - Never use it to escape the child's distress

39

Attachment Styles and Parenting Patterns That Shape Defiance

Insecure Attachment Styles Commonly Linked to ODD:

- **Ambivalent/Resistant:** child becomes emotionally reactive, struggles with trust
- **Disorganized:** child appears confused, aggressive, fearful, or unpredictable in relationships

Parenting Patterns That Increase Risk:

- Inconsistent discipline or lack of follow-through
- Harsh or authoritarian responses to emotion
- Emotional unavailability or enmeshment
- Role reversal (child becomes caretaker or mediator)
- **Core Dynamic:**
Children become oppositional not out of rebellion, but to **protect themselves** in emotionally unsafe or confusing environments.

40

Attachment & Parenting Patterns That Shape Defiance

Insecure Attachment = emotional instability + control seeking

- *Ambivalent:* emotional intensity to gain attention
- *Disorganized:* fear and confusion around caregivers

Parenting Patterns Linked to ODD:

- Inconsistency and unpredictability
- Harsh or authoritarian responses
- Role reversal or emotional enmeshment
- Lack of follow-through or clear boundaries

The Defiance Equation:

Insecure attachment + unclear authority = oppositional survival strategy

41

How Social Media Fuels Emotional Reactivity and Defiance

Digital platforms reward impulsivity and reactivity

- *Frequent use linked to lower self-control and increased emotional volatility* (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Radesky et al., 2020)

Online conflict normalizes disrespect

- *Cyberaggression is associated with increased offline oppositionality and peer rejection* (Low & Espelage, 2013)

Youth identity becomes public and performative

- *Teens model behavior after influencers who often celebrate anti-authority personas* (Uhls et al., 2014)

Social media escalates peer conflict without time for regulation

- *Continuous digital access delays resolution and reduces opportunities to cool down* (George & Odgers, 2015)

42

How Social Media Reinforces Defiance

Digital environments reward emotional reactivity

- Likes, shares, viral content favor outrage over regulation
- (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Radesky et al., 2020)

Social conflict is now constant and performative

- Youth model defiant or aggressive behavior seen online
- (Uhls et al., 2014)

Comparison and surveillance amplify shame and defensiveness

- Peer feedback loops = increased impulsivity and anxiety
- (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2021)

- **Bottom Line:**
Youth are conditioned to seek control, visibility, and social power through escalation.

43

"The more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely they are to recover from trauma and thrive."

— Dr. Bruce Perry

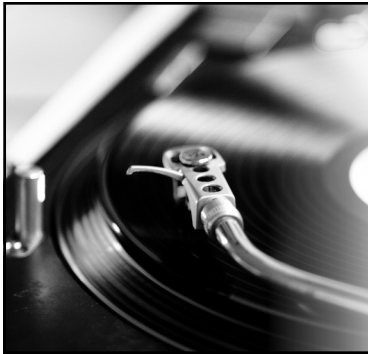


44

Lunch Break



45



🎵 **Building Our Story
in Song:
Workshop Playlist** 🎵


"If you could choose
one song that
captures the spirit of
your childhood — the
emotions, the dreams,
the struggles, or the
hope — what would it
be?"

46

🎵 **Workshop Playlist** 🎵

Think of a song that connects to your own childhood story — the emotions, dreams, struggles, or hopes.
Add your song to our public Spotify playlist
Link:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2t0ifeiRGph22Zns18IPAN7si94a0e423fe3f440b&ot=941hca1e2cf26f424a1eccbb2797e3dd>

- Help us create a musical reflection of resilience, growth, and healing.



47

**Recognizing and Reframing
Defiance**

Seeing What's Really There

48

Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms of ODD

Emotional Symptoms:

- Frequent anger, irritability, or resentment
- Easily annoyed or touchy
- Persistent moodiness

Behavioral Symptoms:

- Argues with adults and authority figures
- Actively refuses to comply with rules or requests
- Deliberately annoys or blames others

Relational Symptoms:

- Peer conflicts or isolation
- Push-pull dynamics with caregivers
- Often perceived as defiant, disruptive, or "bad"

49

Clarifying the Line: Developmental Pushback vs. Clinical Defiance

Typical Behavior

- Eye-rolling, sarcasm in teens
- Refusing chores occasionally
- Tantrums at age 3–4
- Saying "no" or talking back sometimes
- Stomping off during an argument

Clinical Concern (ODD)

- Daily verbal aggression or hostility toward adults
- Persistent pattern of refusal across settings
- Tantrums that continue past age 7
- Arguing with authority figures most days
- Blaming others for nearly all mistakes/conflicts

DSM-5 criteria for ODD

50

How ODD Impacts Youth Functioning

Academic Challenges:

- Refusal to complete tasks, disruptive behavior in class
- Increased disciplinary actions, suspensions, and expulsion risk

Peer Relationships:

- Difficulty maintaining friendships
- Social rejection due to irritability, blame, or controlling behavior

Family Dynamics:

- Power struggles, increased parental stress
- Breakdown in communication and trust

Emotional Well-Being:

- Low frustration tolerance and frequent anger
- Feelings of isolation, shame, and being misunderstood

51

How ODD Affects Academic and Emotional Functioning

- Difficulty initiating and sustaining tasks, especially non-preferred ones
- Avoidance of feedback due to fear of shame or failure
- Escalated responses to redirection or correction
- Increased disciplinary actions, missed learning opportunities
- Emotional dysregulation — rage masking underlying shame, fear, or helplessness

52

How ODD Affects Peer and Family Relationships

- Difficulty sustaining friendships: oppositional behavior wears down peer trust
- Misreads neutral social cues as threatening (hostile attribution bias)
- Defiance becomes identity: peers and family see them as "the difficult one"
- Family system may shift into chronic power struggle or emotional withdrawal

53

How Culture and Systems Shape Defiance

Power and Respect are Culturally Defined:

- What looks like defiance in one culture may be self-protection or expression in another

Implicit Bias in Schools and Systems:

- Youth of color are more likely to be labeled defiant or aggressive
- Disproportionate disciplinary actions and fewer referrals for support

Trauma and Poverty Increase Vulnerability:

- Survival behaviors are often misread as intentional misconduct

Societal Messages:

- Media narratives often frame anger in Black, Brown, and neurodiverse youth as threatening

54

Cultural Norms vs. Institutional Norms

- In some cultures, deference to elders means avoiding eye contact or remaining silent
- School settings may interpret this as defiance or lack of engagement
- Children from immigrant households may navigate conflicting authority expectations at home vs. school
- Cultural styles of expression (e.g., loud voice, movement) may be pathologized

55

Systemic Patterns of Mislabeling

- Racialized youth are 2–3 times more likely to receive punitive discipline (suspension, expulsion)
- Black, Indigenous, and neurodiverse youth often under-identified for support and over-identified for defiance
- LGBTQ+ youth may express defiance in response to identity invalidation or school-based trauma
- Labels like "non-compliant" or "disruptive" can reflect institutional power struggles more than clinical need

56

Disruptors That Shape Oppositional Patterns

Developmental Disruptors:

- Early attachment rupture or inconsistent caregiving
- Prenatal exposure to substances or toxic stress
- Neurological differences (impulsivity, sensory dysregulation)

Cultural/Systemic Disruptors:

- Exposure to racism, poverty, or chronic injustice
- Displacement, immigration trauma, or loss of cultural identity
- Over-surveillance and under-support in schools or institutions

Result:

Emotional survival becomes behavioral resistance.

57

Developmental Disruptors

- Early attachment disruptions: caregiver loss, neglect, inconsistent emotional availability
- Exposure to chronic stress (e.g., parental substance use, domestic violence, housing instability)
- Underdeveloped emotional regulation systems (executive function delays, sensory processing difficulties)
- Low felt safety in early environments primes oppositional responses to control, change, or stress

58

Cultural and Community Stressors

- Racial trauma and intergenerational mistrust of institutions
- Immigration loss and cultural dislocation (language, identity, belonging)
- Chronic poverty, food insecurity, and exposure to community violence
- Youth learn defiance as boundary-setting and cultural self-protection

59

THE DEFIANCE FUNNEL



The Defiance Funnel –
What's Beneath the
Behavior

60

Mapping the Roots of Defiance: Individual or Group Reflection

Choose a child, teen, or student who displayed defiant behavior

Reflect on or discuss:

1. What **developmental disruptors** may have shaped them?
(*early attachment issues, trauma, neurodivergence*)
2. What **cultural or systemic stressors** may have played a role?
(*poverty, racism, identity conflict, school surveillance*)
3. What might their behavior be **protecting them from**?
4. How has your perspective shifted based on today's conversation?

61



62

Final Reflection

What shifted for you today?

63

Final Reflection: What Shifted for You Today?

Take 2–3 minutes to reflect on any of the following:

- What felt new, surprising, or validating?
- What belief about defiance are you rethinking?
- What part of today challenged you — or stayed with you?
- What do you want to carry into tomorrow?
- 📖 You can journal, sketch, or pause in silence.
- 🗣️ Optional: share 1 word or insight with a partner or in the chat.

64

Let It Land

Take 5 minutes to write or discuss:

- What insight will you carry into tomorrow?
- What's one question you're still sitting with?

65

From Behavior to Belief

What if defiance is a child saying, *"Will you still love me if I resist you?"*

What if behavior is not the problem, but the signal?

- What if your compassion is the intervention?

66

Reframing Defiance: What Do You See Now?

Revisit one youth you met earlier (e.g., Mateo, Aisha)

Group prompt:

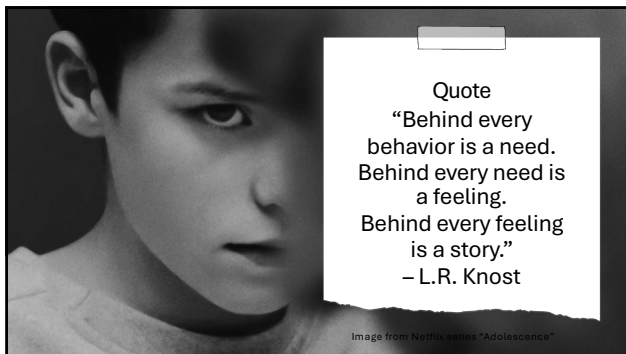
- What do you see differently now?
- How would your response shift tomorrow?

67

Behavior + Emotion: Why Both Matter

1. Behavior is what we see — but emotion is what drives it
2. Defiance is often emotional dysregulation in disguise
3. Our systems tend to focus on control, not connection
4. Lasting change comes from supporting both:
 - **External behavior**
 - **Internal experience**

68



69

Thank You for Today!
What's Ahead Tomorrow

Today we explored:

- The roots of oppositional behavior
- Cultural, systemic, and developmental disruptors
- How behavior is shaped by emotion and survival

Tomorrow we'll dive into:

- Practical interventions and relational strategies
- Emotion regulation tools that actually work
- Planning systems that support youth, families, and staff
