

Tips for Parents on Non-Compliant Children

Non-compliance is when a child refuses to obey or comply with a demand or directive. The child may be rebellious, scream "no" to your face, and slam the door. Or the child may say "yes, I'd be glad to help," smile, and go play video games. But either way the child does not do what you asked him to do. Here are more examples of non compliance:

- The child fails to begin doing what he was clearly asked to do within a reasonable amount of time, which would easily be 15 seconds.
- The child fails to keep doing what he was asked to do until the job is finished.
- The child fails to follow previously taught rules of conduct in a specific situation, such as at church, at school, at the store, or with friends.

Non compliance is a behavior, and like any behavior the way we as parents and therapists react to it will influence the behavior. If you are seeing consistent non compliance in the home or school, then your reaction to the child's non compliance is not effective.

What to Do When Non Compliance Happens

When your child is non-compliant you need to take action.

You simply cannot ignore the behavior hoping that it will go away. In fact, non-compliant behavior can be "self-reinforcing" or "self-rewarding" behavior. In other words, every time your child gets away with not doing what you had asked him to do, he feels "rewarded." And behavior that is "rewarded" tends to re-occur. So every time your child gets away with being non-compliant it increases the odds that he will be non-compliant to you again.

Deal with the situation immediately yourself. And in very tough situations consider getting some professional help. In fact, non-compliance in children is the most frequent complaint of parents seeking behavioral help. It is frustrating to parents, and underlies most negative interactions between family members (parents, and siblings) and the child.

Disruptive behaviors, aggressive behaviors, or explosive behaviors, usually do not occur randomly. Instead they occur in "bursts" and are usually associated with either having asked the child to do something around the house, or after having been asked for something by the child and the parents responds with a "no."

Children do most things, good or bad, on purpose. Behavior is not random. Sometimes your child will misbehave on purpose. When he does, it is because he is testing you. He is observing you to see how you will react. He wants to know if you will ignore the behavior, or excuse it, or just do the chore yourself. He wants to know if you will react with anger, guilt, or not at all.

The child will do things either :

- to get POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT, or
- to ESCAPE or AVOID SOMETHING that he does not want to do or have.

Having a strong knowledge of behavior management will allow you to be in control of your home, and it will allow the child to feel safe and secure. Children crave discipline, and children with special needs will often need many repetitions of practicing good behavior before it sticks. Be firm, and be patient. Understand that any behavior your child has learned, will take time to unlearn.

Specific Tips & Strategies

- **Allow the Student a 'Cool-Down' Break** - Select an area in the home or classroom where the child can take a break or go calm down if they need to. The area should be quiet, calm, away from noise, windows, or doors, and you can include items such as music, sensory toys, cushions, beanbags, etc. Whenever the child becomes upset and defiant, offer to talk the situation over with that student once he or she has calmed down and then direct the student to the cool-down corner. For example, "Thomas, I will talk to you when you calm down. Take five minutes in the cool-down corner and then we can talk."
- **Ask Open-Ended Questions** -If you are faced with a confrontational or angry child and you don't know what happened or why they are upset, you can ask neutral, open-ended questions to collect more information before responding. You can pose 'who', 'what', 'where', 'when', and 'how' questions to more fully understand the problem situation and identify possible solutions. One caution: Avoid asking 'why' questions (e.g., "Why did you get into that fight with your sister?") because they can imply that you are blaming the child.
- **Do Not Get Entangled in Arguments** - Avoid being dragged into arguments or unnecessary discussion when disciplining children. If you find yourself being drawn into an exchange with the child (e.g., raising your voice, explaining yourself over and over), immediately use strategies to disengage yourself (e.g., by move away from the child, stop answering their questions, look away, etc).

- **Use Positive Language** – Tell the child what you DO want them to do, instead of what you DON'T want them to do. If the child is running and you want them to stop, say “Use walking feet please” instead of “Stop running”. If you just tell the child to stop doing an action or activity that leave the decision of what to do instead up to the child. So instead of running they could decide to climb, skip, or hop, but not to walk.
- **Provide Frequent Positive Attention** - Make an effort to say 3 positive statements to your child for every 1 negative statement you say. This may be difficult, and will require “catching” your child being good. If the child gets attention freely and often, then they don't need to misbehave to get your attention.
- **When Negative Behaviors Appear, “Go Neutral”**- When your child begins misbehaving or is off task, immediately avoid direct eye contact, excessive language, or touch. All of these are powerful sources of attention. You want to make a clear distinction between how you act when they behave, and how you act when they misbehave. Your facial expression should be blank, not angry, excited, stressed, etc. Your voice tone should be flat and neutral, and shouldn't reflect how upset or exasperated you are. The more excited, loud, and angry the child becomes, the calmer you need to remain and appear.
- **Interrupt the Student's Anger as soon as they are Triggered**- Know your child's triggers and how they act, speak, and behave when they are becoming angry or upset. As soon as you see that they are beginning to get worked up, immediately intervene. Redirect them to do something else, try to get them to go to their calm cool down area, do an activity together, etc. Don't wait and act on the behavior once the child is already upset.
- **Offer Choices** – A powerful tool to use with non compliant children is to offer them a choice. If the child is off task or misbehaving, the choice can be to get on task or lose something they enjoy (“You need to stop arguing with your sister and eat your dinner, or it will be bedtime”). If the child is being defiant and refusing to complete a task you can give them a choice between two tasks (“You can take your bath tonight, or you can take it in the morning before school”). Choice making can allow a child to feel powerful and in control, and will sometimes defuse defiant behavior. If the child will not make a choice, then you make the choice for them. They need to understand they are given a small amount of time to select a choice and if they don't, then you get to decide what happens. It is important to be consistent, and follow through with the choice. If the child is playing with friends and makes a choice to do their homework once their friends go home, then as soon as their friends leave that child needs to start their homework right away. Choice making will not be effective if the child is not required to follow through with the choice they made.