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## INCENTIVE BASED BEHAVIORAL MODIFICATION PROGRAM FOR OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT CHILDREN

### ISSUES & ASSESSMENT:

Many oppositional children are seeking greater control in their own lives as a means of dealing with the **lack of power and control** they otherwise feel in their own families, school, and the community.

Many oppositional behaviors are **attempts to get validation** (not just attention) from adults.

The parents and family of oppositional children, for various reasons, are often **ineffective** at giving appropriate validation and attention- they usually **feel out of control themselves** (and not just with their oppositional children).

Oppositional children and their parents (or teachers) end up in a **power struggle** where both lose.

**Punishment** usually has become the mode of discipline despite its ineffectiveness.

**Placating** the child often becomes the only alternative to avoid **conflict**.

**Anger (and its relative Resentment)** usually becomes the predominant emotion, sabotaging the relationship.

### PRINCIPLES & GOALS:

Create real (and appropriate) **power and control** for both children and parents.

Create means for the child to get **validation**.

Defuse the power struggle and create the "**Win, Win**" situation.

Remove punishment as a mode of discipline and replace with **reinforcement/reward** principles.

Remove conflict from the relationship and replace with **contracts**.

Remove anger as relevant to the relationship.

### STRATEGIES & PRACTICALITIES:

Define **GOALS** and **REWARDS** as different but related. Punishments are not a part of this plan. Goals are behaviors that must occur in frequent and consistent ways, that once achieved result in Rewards.

Never take away any achieved "points." In this plan, children never lose credit for achieved goals for misbehavior. Misbehavior results in the lack of progress toward goals (and resultant rewards), but does not discredit the children's positive behavior. This avoids the focus on punishment.

**Quantify and define** children's behaviors desired by parents/adults. Avoid subjective definitions of behavior- example, "Be good- don't be bad", "Be more helpful around the house." Clear definitions of desirable behaviors would be, "Do all your homework before any TV," "Get to school on time or early every day," "If you are going to be half an hour late or more, call and let us know," "Put away your laundry before going to bed," "Do all your chores before you go out to play." Quantify means **yes** or **no**, not "sort of" or "later" or "intend to."

The **CHILD** (through negotiation with the adult), **chooses his/her own rewards**. If toys are attractive to him/her...if money is...if privileges...if video games...if excursions... The principle is that these rewards have to be meaningful to the child- not to the adult. The child should be encouraged and led to minor, more substantial, and major rewards. (see following page for an example).

The **ADULT** (through negotiation with the child) **sets the short term, mid-term, and long term goals**. If a clean room is attractive to him/her...if chores are...if homework is...if school attendance is...if attendance at family functions... The principle is that the goals are meaningful to the adult now, and will have meaning for the child in life as he/she integrates them into his/her lifestyle and expectations. The adult should pick minor **frequency & consistency** behavior goals, more substantial goals, and major goals.



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More substantial and major behavioral goals may be matched up with **bonus rewards**- such as more money, more points to redeem, or a special excursion, privilege, or present.

Once the adult and the child agrees on the rewards and goals, then a **CONTRACT** can be made (writing it up and having it signed is recommended). With the contract, the adult does not need to be angry at the child or punish him/her; the adult only has to adhere to his/her part of the contract. If the child holds to his/her end, then he/she accumulates the points, achieves the goals, and gets the rewards. If he/she doesn't, then he/she doesn't! The adult has to do nothing, except not sabotage the contract. Sabotaging the contract, would be finding ways to save the child from getting the consequences of not behaving (no points, no goals, no rewards). Oppositional children can be very manipulative and tend to be experts at getting adults to change the contract to save them from the choices they have made. **DON'T DO IT!** If the adult "saves" the child from his/her choice, the adult effectively undermines him/herself and any possibility of the child learning a sense of responsibility.

While this plan can be very effective, it depends on the adult following through. In addition, not all children are oppositional because of their need for power and control. Sometimes, they are oppositional because of the adult's controlling. And, sometimes, they are oppositional because of profoundly adverse family issues.

Sample plans

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**INCENTIVE BASED BEHAVIORAL MODIFICATION PROGRAM  
FOR OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT CHILDREN- SAMPLE PLANS**

<u>GOAL</u>	<u>REWARD</u>
5 points	frozen yogurt, or extra half hour TV, or new pog,
10 points	one hour control of TV remote control, or comic book, or new markers, or \$1, or \$5
50 points	T-shirt, or doll, or video rental, or day trip to beach, or overnight guest, or \$5, or \$10
100 points	CD, or video game, or dinner at McDonald's, or magazine subscription, or \$20, or \$40
500 points	Great America, or boombox, or bicycle, or \$100, or \$200

How Points are Earned

	1pt/day	5pt/wk	10pt/2wks	20pt/mo	100pt/6mo	totals*
6 days desired behavior	6					6 points
1 weeks desired behavior points	7	5				12
2 weeks desired behavior points	14	5+5	10			34
3 weeks desired behavior points	21	5+5+5	10			46
1 month desired behavior points	30	5+5+5+5	10+10	20		90
2 months desired behavior	60	5+5+5+5+5+5 5+5+5+5+5	10+10+ 20+20 10+10			185 pts
6 months desired behavior	183	5+5+5+5+5+5 5+5+5+5+5 5+5+5+5+5 5+5+5+5+5 5+5+5+5+5	10+10+10+10+10+ 10+10+10+10+10+ 10+10+10	20+20+20+ 20+20+20	100	663 pts

**\*Note: Totals are accumulative, that is, the totals are for if no points are traded for rewards prior to the achievement of the goals.**

- **Frequency and/or consistency** should be rewarded.
- The **greater the goal, the greater the reward**. Achieving minor goals should result in minor rewards; more substantial goals have more substantial rewards; major goals have major rewards.
- **Children choose rewards** (through negotiation with adults).
- **Adults choose goals** (through negotiation with children).