

living a life of daily revolution.” The revolutionary ideas supported by anarchists can be reflected in how we choose to parent our children. As anarchists, we can follow the dominant childrearing practices, or we can choose to maintain our passion for social change and work to create the kind of world we want for our children.

## **Parenting a Defiant Child: A Sanity Saving Guide to Finally Stopping the Bad Behavior**

Philip S. Hall and Nancy D. Hall.  
New York: American Management Association, 2007.

### **Reviewed by Tatjana Takševa Chorney**

This guidebook offers step-by-step techniques and skills that will enable parents to transform their confrontational relationship with a defiant child. Written in jargon-free prose, the book includes key statements and concepts in highlighted boxes, which makes it a particularly accessible work. It aims to distinguish itself from other parenting books by favouring a preventative over a punitive approach to non-compliant behaviour. I support the premise that prevention works better than punitive measures, which focus on consequences rather than causes.

The book is divided into three sections: Prevention, Managing Non-compliance and Defiance, and Planning for Success in the Community. Each section emphasizes practical concerns, and the end of each chapter includes a section entitled Applications. The three sections are organized in a linear and sequential way, and provide parents with exercises, examples, and activities that will help them implement the ideas and proposals presented in the preceding chapter. As authors Philip S. Hall and Nancy D. Hall rightly point out, “there is no one big thing”(x) that a parent can do to solve the problem of defiance in children. Solutions come from consistently following a series of small steps and actions that will eventually modify undesirable behaviour.

The authors define defiant behaviour in descriptive rather than summative terms. They pose five questions for parents to answer: “Does my child frequently provoke other people? Does my child intentionally defy me? Does my child maliciously antagonize and fight with his or her sibling? Does my child throw a temper tantrum when he doesn’t get his way? Do I let my child get away with things so that I can have some peace and quiet?” (ix). If parents answer “yes” to two or more of these questions, and the defiant child is older than three years of age, then it is time for action. The authors do not say, however, that a child’s defiance is often a justifiable reaction to a set of circumstances that may have been exacerbated by parents’ momentary or ongoing lack of insight, patience, or energy.

In section one, the authors gesture toward a more nuanced understanding of defiance by suggesting that “many children who display excessive noncompliance, defiance and aggression have what mental health professionals call Oppositional Defiant Disorder,” but not all children who are noncompliant, defiant, and aggressive have this disorder (8). They also argue that a professional should carefully diagnose a child with serious behaviour problems. This section underscores the importance of routine, good communication, strategies that strengthen the parent child-relationship, and creating an environment where the desired behavioural response is the easiest and most natural one for the child.

In section two, the authors acknowledge that prevention measures and new routines do not mean that the defiant behaviour will cease, and strategies are provided to help parents guide their child through relapses. Here parents learn how to teach children to gain self-control by recognizing so-called “antecedents” or “triggers” of emotional meltdowns through role-playing and self-charting; that routine removes the necessity for parent-child power struggles; and that removing privileges is often the most effective way to encourage the child to display the desired behaviour. Here, the authors make the important statement that parenting is about teaching children the skills they need in many areas, including behaviour (144).

Section three moves outside the home, and provides advice and strategies for parents when it comes to dealing with schools, daycares, and other places in the community, including car trips, playing with friends, and shopping for groceries. In general, the suggested approach is proactive. For example, with regard to school, parents are advised to take the initiative to meet with the school principal, to be candid about their child’s behaviour, and to work on building a respectful relationship with teachers based on ongoing communication. The authors also draw attention to special services available within the education system, and provide practical suggestions on how to access these services. The book concludes with a chapter entitled Parting Advice, which incorporates a blank nine-month calendar to help parents manage the systematic implementation of the suggested activities at the end of each chapter, taking one chapter per month. Application activities can be fitted onto the calendar with one assignment or goal per week.

The authors aim to help parents persevere in their efforts to eliminate a child’s problematic behaviour. The book avoids laying blame on parents or examining to what extent parents’ own behaviour may have contributed to or may be solely responsible for a child’s defiant behaviour. The obvious and perhaps justified merit of this approach is that no parent will feel alienated by this book. Nonetheless, the authors claim that modifying defiant behaviour in children often must start with modifying problematic aspects of the behaviour of parents. Finally, I endorse the author’s decision to leave their readers with a Chinese proverb: “The longest journey begins with a single step.”