Negativism Encyclopedia Article

Negativism

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Negativism

A tendency to resist complying with directions or suggestions.

Negativism is a behavior characterized by the tendency to resist direction from others, and the refusal to comply with requests. Negativism appears and wanes at various stages of a child's development. Active negativism, that is, behavior characterized by doing the opposite of what is being asked, is commonly encountered with young children. For example, a parent may ask a toddler to come away from the playground to return home; on hearing these instructions, the toddler demonstrates active negativism by running away.

Infant studies have revealed that negativism develops during the first year of life, and resurfaces during toddlerhood and again during adolescence. Negativism is used by adolescents as a way to assert their autonomy from their parents, and to control their own behavior. When negativism does not diminish, it becomes a characteristic of the individual's personality. Negativism is an aspect of one of the essential features of **oppositional-defiant disorder,** characterized by a pattern of behavior that is defiant, negativistic, and hostile toward authority figures. However, for the majority of children who display negativism, the behavior will pass with further development.

For Further Study

Books

Baker, Lynne Rudder. *Explaining Attitudes: A Practical Approach to the Mind.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Craighead, Linda W. *Cognitive and Behavioral Interventions: An Empirical Approach to Mental Health Problems.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994.

Eagly, Alice Hendrickson. *The Psychology of Attitudes.* Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993.

Miller, William R. *Motivational Enhancement Therapy Manual.* Rockville, MD: National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1995.

Solnit, Albert J., Peter B. Neubauer, Samuel Abrams, and A. Scott Dowling. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.

Periodicals

Belsky, Jay. "Infant Positive and Negative Emotionality: One Dimension or Two?" *Developmental Psychology* 32, March 1996, pp. 289-98.

Wenar, Charles. "On Negativism." *Human Development* 25, January-February 1982, pp. 1-23.

Audiovisual Recordings

Touchpoints: The Brazelton Study, Volume 2: First Months Through One Year. New York: GoodTimes Home Video, 1992.
(One 45-minute videocassette.)