**Rethinking Your Thinks**

When you are at home and your child just doesn’t seem to listen to a word you say or actually seems to do the opposite of what you want, resist thinking about this situation as “oppositional”. Even if your child has been diagnosed as having ASD and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) it is important to remember that both are ***behaviorally defined*** disorders.  There is no blood test, a clinical Psychologist observes, interviews and calls it.  This is a very important point to help parents understand so that they don't get hung up on labels but focus on specific issues. If you “think” you are observing oppositional and defiant behavior, your brain will lead you to very behavioral and sometimes punitive options. This is not a good idea. Rethink the words you use to describe the situation you are observing. Perhaps your child is too confused or anxious to think and act in a positive way. Perhaps your child doesn’t have the skills needed to regulate his or her emotions, reactions or responses.

Temple Grandin makes a great point in her recent book, The Autistic Brain (2013. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) saying "I guarantee you that if you take a third-grader who can read high school math texts and make him do baby-math drills over and over and over, he will turn oppositional defiant - because he is bored out of his mind."

It is important to look at your individual child and then to look at the thinking skills he or she lacks.  Another good book that relates nicely with this thought is Lost at School by Ross Greene (2008. Scribner).  Greene focuses on ADHD, Anxiety Disorders, Mood Disorders and ODD as disorders concerned with cognitive domains such as regulating one's own emotions, considering the outcomes of one's actions before he acts, understanding how one's behavior is affecting other people, and being able to ***respond to social demands in a flexible manner.***

There is a publication called *Training the Brain: Cultivating Emotional Skills* by Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson (2012). Davidson is a pioneer in an area of science called Contemplative Neuroscience and he talks about emotional or brain styles (related to everyone).  One "style" involves a hair-trigger amygdala - people who become easily upset, frustrated or angered.  His over-riding recommendation is ***relaxation and meditation in all forms.***

The research in the area of friendship indicates that we learn our social flexibility skills through friendships.  Children with autism, by definition, have significant problems with friendships and so would have little practice to exercise that part of the brain.  Even one good friend has been shown to help so consider some FaceTime with a friend during quarantine.

Teach relaxation and self-awareness to help your child learn to regulate his or her emotional responses. Recognize that inflexible thinking is part of both the autism diagnosis and ODD diagnosis so teaching flexible thinking, tolerance for varied opinions, and Ross Greene's Collaborative Problem Solving are all good ideas.