

Question: Why is my teenager so angry?

Answer: First, teens deal with the emotional rollercoaster. It is a normal part of being a teenager. However, teen anger many times just comes out incorrectly. They often yell and say things like “I hate you and I wish I was dead”. Parents struggle with knowing what to do when they hear things like these as well as with how to respond.

Teens say awful things when a parent denies them a request like going out with friends or doing something fun. Sometimes, this behavior stems from the parent giving in when these kinds of words/tactics are used. They will continue to act in this manner as long as the parent gives in – the teen is simply playing the system to get their way. Parents can do a great deal to begin get control of these situations by keeping to their word and not giving in. Once the teen understands that the parent is not going to cave in the behavior many times stops.

Another reason for angry outbursts is depression. Anger and irritability is one of the symptoms of depression and can be a warning sign that something else is happening in the teenager’s life outside the normal realm of teen defiance. Questions to ask are as follows: Has the teen been crying nearly every day for 2 weeks or more; Do they seem to have lost their energy; Are they sleeping more or less than they have in the past; Are they eating more or less than usual – has there been a significant weight gain or loss; Have they lost interest in their usual activities; Are they feeling guilty or is their self-esteem lower; Are they having difficulty concentrating or acting confused; Are they seeing or hearing things that others cannot; Is there an increased or decreased interest in sexual desires; and Are they more angry or irritable (lack of patience with others or with themselves).

Teens often respond to stressors of new situations by getting depressed – look back a few months and note the changes in the teen’s life. Some that often have an impact are new school, breakup of friendships – romantic or not, divorce or other parental problems, a new living situation – recent move – even if it is in the same general area.

Another thing that parents can do to improve their relationships with their teenager is to notice that they are comparing their teen to other teenagers or to themselves when they were teens. This many times happens when the teen has gotten in trouble or has started to get bad grades. Parents need to take things like “you should be more like...”, “when I was a teenager...”, and “you used to be so...” out of their conversations with their teen. This allows the teenager to start at the present and improve from there rather than constantly bringing up the past because all they hear when these statements are used is “you are not good enough”, “you are hopeless” or they have stopped listening to a well meaning parent.