



Understanding Teen Defiance

Raising a teenager isn't always a walk in the park. There are times that it may be a real struggle to get them to see where you are coming from and why there are certain rules in place to protect them. There are likely temper tantrums, butting heads, raging hormones, and arguments over curfews, dress codes, rules, privileges, attending parties, which friends they can hang out with, body piercings, tattoos, dating, and the list goes on.

These struggles are normal for most families with teenagers. However, when the power struggles and arguments turn into aggressive outbursts and complete and total rebellion against all authority, this may be a sign that there is something more serious going on that requires counseling and therapy services.

Some young people struggle with a diagnosis called Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). Currently in the U.S., ODD affects approximately 16% of teenagers. While this statistic may sound high, it's important to note that the various forms of ODD have varying degrees of severity, from low to high.



Some more good news is that 67% of kids diagnosed with ODD will resolve their issues within three years. Seven out of ten kids will no longer show symptoms once they reach age 18, and 70% of kids who seek treatment will show vast improvements within four months' time.

Unfortunately, for those who are unable to seek treatment or resolve their ODD symptoms, the impact can be crippling. Those who develop ODD have a 40% risk of developing antisocial personality disorder later in life. It can also increase a teen's risk for developing depression and anxiety.

This is why treatment is of the utmost importance when dealing with symptoms of a defiant teen, and the sooner intervention begins, the better. If your child or teen is showing any signs of defiance in an extreme or negative way, please contact us. Our life's work involves helping at-risk teens and their families forge positive new paths in life for the better. If you'd like to get your family on a more positive path, give us a call.

What Is Defiance?

It's normal for teens to challenge and test us, but when rules and authority are completely disregarded to your teen's own detriment, it is a sign of a more serious issue.

There many causes for some of the symptoms of defiance, such as the death of a parent or loved one, abuse, depression, and trauma. If left untreated, these symptoms could worsen into a more serious disorder.

Some red flags that could signal you have a defiant teen on your hands include:

- Drops in grades and/or a refusal to complete homework or study
- Skipping school
- Refusal to complete chores
- Refusal to participate in family and community events
- Becoming physically threatening to parents
- Zero concern for authority or consequences
- Refusing to follow social norms and boundaries
- Inability to regulate emotions or control temper
- Becoming easily frustrated and irritable

- Is “touchy”—easily annoyed by others
- Engaging in conflict with authority on a regular basis
- Purposely riling up others
- Blaming others for his/her own mistakes, refusal to take ownership of actions
- Is vindictive or spiteful, at least twice in the past six months
- Antisocial behavior, or difficulty maintaining personal relationships
- Impulsive behavior
- Substance use

Defiance in teenagers may also coincide with depression, anxiety, ADHD, learning disabilities, etc.

If you have a defiant teen on your hands, it’s important to seek help now to get them on a better path before their symptoms worsen and current behaviors become behavioral patterns. Those with this disorder, especially those who do not seek treatment, are more likely to experience issues with others and especially with authority, such as at work, in the community, and with the law later in life, both as teens and adults.

If your teen is exhibiting any of the warning signs of defiance, please give us a call at Idaho Youth Ranch to set up a consultation. We will evaluate your teen and provide you with a treatment plan that works best for your family. No matter what your teen is going through right now, healing and recovery are possible with a bit of guided care. We use a variety of evidence-based treatment methods to help your teen overcome the struggles they are facing and shift their life onto a more positive path.

What Is Normal Defiance?

Normal defiance is much like some of the examples we mentioned above when discussing normal teenage behaviors and struggles over curfews, dress codes, rules, privileges, the volume of the stereo, etc.

Teenagers are physically turning into adults, but the prefrontal cortex of their brains have several more years of growth and development to go through. This means they can be more compulsive, and it’s possible for their behaviors to be governed by their emotions or current fleeting notions, with less regard for the “big picture” or long-term consequences.



Teenagers want the privileges of adults without having yet learned through experience how to handle such trust and autonomy. They may want to stay out late with their friends; be free from parental supervision; experiment with drugs, alcohol, and sex; and do anything else that piques their interest.

All these things can have detrimental consequences years down the line, which is why teens need rules and structure from parents and authority figures. When teens are outright defiant against *all* rules and social norms, this signifies a problem.

Normal defiance includes anything that represents the teen's struggle with wanting to be an adult and have certain freedoms. Teens will also commonly test their boundaries and limits and see how much they can get away with while challenging and questioning every rule that is in place that they do not agree with. This is normal. However, when teens do this to the point that it disrupts their normal life functions, such as exhibiting any of the warning flags listed above and causing issues with school officials and/or the law, it is time to seek some help.

Families with Defiant Teenagers

Having a defiant teenager can put a considerable amount of strain on the family unit, especially if there is already conflict in the home. Parents are legally responsible for their teens, so having a teenager who is causing problems with the law and is aggressive or physically threatening can present an especially difficult and scary situation for parents to endure. This situation can cause parents and families to feel helpless and to not know what to do to get things under control.

When dealing with a defiant teen, strong and decisive action on behalf of parents and guardians is necessary. Setting strong boundaries is key and is especially needed when there are other children in the home. Since defiance can often be triggered or perpetuated by conflict in the home, trauma, or abuse, it may be necessary to engage in some family therapy sessions to unpack some of the possible issues that are occurring in the home and how everyone can best help one another cope and communicate in a healthy way. When families come together to share, listen, and support one another, it can be healing for all involved.



If your family is being impacted by defiance in the home from a teen or adolescent, we are here for you and we want you to know that your family does not have to struggle alone. We offer a variety of evidence-based therapeutic methods—for both individuals and families—that have been shown to be effective in helping treat defiant teens and help their family unit bond and heal.

If you'd like to explore different parenting methods, we offer a variety of parenting classes and resources for parents and families of youth struggling in life for many reasons.

Raising a Defiant Teen

If you have found yourself raising a defiant teen, it's important to know that this does not mean that you are a failure as a parent. It does not mean that you are at fault, or that your child is damaged beyond the point of help. There are a variety of reasons why your child may be acting defiant, and some of the more common reasons include trauma, abuse, conflict in the home, bullying, or the death of a loved one.

Regardless of the causes of defiance of your teen, raising him or her can be an added struggle, especially when your teen is in defiance of your authority and rules or acts out aggressively.

Strong rules and boundaries, consistency, and decisive actions are the best courses of action when dealing with a defiant teen.

There are a variety of ways to help equip your teen with the tools they need to survive the hardships of life and become more resilient against whatever may come their way. In doing so, they will be less susceptible to developing defiant behavior again in the future, and they will learn healthier ways of coping with emotional pain, letdowns, setbacks, disappointments, frustrations, etc.

Parenting a Defiant Teen Son/Daughter

It's especially important for parents to pay close attention to their parenting habits and skills when their son or daughter is being defiant. Some parenting tips to help manage your defiant son or daughter include:

- **Set clear rules, boundaries, and expectations.** There cannot be any question in your teen's mind about what is and is not appropriate behavior in your home, in school, with you and family, and with others.
- **Have your teen sign a contract.** Write down your rules, boundaries, and expectations on paper as a contract, and have your teen sign it.
- **Earn privileges by following rules, lose them when rules are broken.** Allowance, going out with friends, driving, television, phones, computers, tablets, etc. should be seen as privileges that can be taken away if rules are not followed.
- **Do not respond emotionally.** Stay calm and in control, and be direct and to the point. Staying in control of your emotions prevents parents from having angry outbursts that can do more harm than good. Do not empower your teen by giving them the pleasure of manipulating your feelings and emotions or riling you up.
- **Choose your battles.** You do not have to argue and conflict with your teen over everything to show your authority. Choose your battles wisely and do not budge or compromise on the important issues, and your teen will start to understand what is expected and what the limits are.

How to Help Your Child: Strategies to Try at Home

It can be difficult to watch your teen struggling, and it's only natural to want to try to help them or fix the problem in some way. Unfortunately, there are things that our kids are going to face in their lives that we cannot fix as their parents, and this can feel especially frustrating. The good news is that there are some things that parents can do to help their defiant teen, and there are some strategies to try at home that can help them comply and start adopting healthier behaviors.

The first thing that parents can do is to try to find the root cause of the problem. [Talk to your teen](#) and ask them what is going on. Do not show any anger, criticism, or harsh words when doing so. Rather, take your teen to a space that feels comfortable and safe for them to talk and open without any external threats. Do not show any judgment; rather, give them unconditional positive regard. Try to hear them and understand what it is like for them and what they have been going through.



Do not pry. Simply let them know that you are there for them to talk and that you've noticed a change in their attitude and behavior that concerns you, mostly because you don't want it to have a negative impact on their wellbeing. Connect regularly with your teen and let them know you are there for them for support, to talk, and to share quality time and conversations together.

Make therapy a requirement for moving forward, if needed. Be sure to ensure your teen keeps up with all therapy sessions, including group or family therapy sessions. It's also helpful to have a structured, busy daily routine for your teen; a schedule full of opportunities to engage with others and positive activities is ideal.

Take the suggestions that resonate most with you, your teen, and your family situation, and form a game plan. Each case and teen is different, and some circumstances are worse than others, so it's important to use your judgment and do what is best for your home when forming the plan. You may need to exercise some out-of-the-box thinking and try a variety of approaches until you find the most effective method for managing your teen. When in doubt, do not hesitate to give us a call. We are here to help.

When to Get Help

If your teen is exhibiting any of the warning signs of defiance, it's never too soon to intervene and start with individual, group, and/or family therapy sessions to help get him/her back on the right track in life. The teen years are very delicate times of personal growth and development, and sometimes the behaviors, coping skills, and patterns that are formed during these years can last well into adulthood, presenting greater challenges down the line.

It's important to seek treatment for your teen as soon as possible if he or she is acting out aggressively, showing violent behavior, and/or getting into trouble with school or the law. Defiant traits do not have to become a life sentence for a life spent in and out of jail or with an inability to hold down consistent employment. When teens get the right kind of treatment and care to help them overcome these struggles, they are more likely to lead successful lives, both as students and adults entering their chosen careers.



How Idaho Youth Ranch Can Help Your Teen

Using a variety of therapeutic approaches that have been shown to be effective at treating the signs and symptoms of teen defiance, the experienced professionals at Idaho Youth Ranch will work with your teen in an individual and group setting to treat the issue at its roots and help your family get onto a positive path of healing and loving support.

We specialize in working with youth who have experienced trauma or something significant that is causing them to struggle in life. Whether it's conflict in the home, the death of a loved one, a traumatic experience, or abuse, we are here to help your teen not only overcome and survive, but thrive in life for years to come. We love nothing more than hearing success stories from those who come to us for help. It is our mission to help your preteen or teen by forming a treatment plan uniquely tailored to address his or her needs and meet them where they are.

We all need help at times, and we are to support you and your adolescent on a path toward personal growth, recovery, and healing.