



Understanding Teen Anger

Anger is a normal emotion. We all feel angry occasionally, and teens are certainly no exception. Teens are going through many changes that can cause them to become angry and to express their emotions immediately rather than sit back and reflect in the moment.

Teens are going through a time when they are separating from their parents in preparation for entering the world as autonomous, independent adults. This impending shift can cause teens to use anger and attitudes to separate from their parents when necessary.

Since the teen brain is still developing, teens may be more impulsive or can act unreasonably, especially when experiencing emotional or psychological distress. However, when anger overtakes a teen and is expressed behaviorally with aggression, this could be a sign of a more serious issue.

Angry teen vs. teenager who is angry

As mentioned, anger is a normal emotion that we all feel from time to time. However, problems can arise when anger is expressed behaviorally as aggression.

Since teens are going through various changes and may feel fear, uncertainty, apprehension, and even [anxiety](#) about the future, they naturally experience shifts in temperament and behavior. We typically associate this with teen angst; sometimes, anger is thrown into the same category. Anger is more about what has happened to your teen or what your teen feels should or shouldn't have happened to them.

An angry teen will exhibit expressions of anger frequently and may seem constantly mad or upset at the world rather than directing the anger onto one specific person or thing. This persistent anger can have a significant impact on the family unit.

It's also common for teens to develop thinking errors from distorted thoughts. These ideas in their heads are overgeneralized and do not match reality. They tend to be negative, self-defeating, and exist from a victimized standpoint.

While it is normal for teens to engage in this type of behavior, there are various forms of therapy, such as [DBT](#) and [CBT](#), that can help challenge these distorted thoughts so teens can bring themselves back to reality in the moment.

Why is my teenager so angry?

Adolescence can bring many changes emotionally, psychologically, and physically.

Teens commonly feel misunderstood by adults. This can cause friction between parents and teens, especially when it causes teens to feel controlled or like they do not have a sense of autonomy or freedom.

The anger your teen is expressing may also be a sign that something has happened to them. When trauma is experienced, teens tend to react in one of two ways: by either internalizing the pain, which can be exhibited via symptoms of [depression](#), [anxiety](#), or [self-harm](#), or by externalizing the pain, which can present with anger, aggression, or harm to another individual. Anger could also be symptomatic of a mental health issue such as bipolar disorder, depression, conduct disorder, or even substance abuse.



How anger is expressed can determine whether it is problematic. Teens may not express their anger as maturely as adults, so encouragement regarding managing and expressing emotions in healthy ways may be needed. Teens, especially males, are often socialized to suppress their feelings, as emotional expression can sometimes be seen as a sign of weakness. Reminding your teen it's healthy to identify and express feelings can help increase their emotional intelligence.

What are the dangers of unmanaged anger?

Teenagers who struggle to control their moods and anger without proper support can lead to more significant issues later on in life and make getting help or changing their behavioral patterns as adults even more difficult. Teens must learn to manage their feelings and express their anger in healthy ways when they are young to develop healthy coping skills that they'll use as adults.

Such issues associated with anger control problems that are left unchecked include issues with the law, difficulties holding consistent employment or dealing with authority figures, and difficulties in one's own social life.

As previously mentioned, anger may also be a sign of a mental health issue. Bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder, [depression](#), [anxiety](#), conduct disorder, antisocial personality disorder, and substance abuse may all show symptoms of anger control issues or persistent anger.

If left unchecked, this can lead to greater mental health issues later down the line. It can also cause teens to engage in risky or unsafe behaviors, such as drug use or abuse, risky sexual behavior, internet addiction, exercising too much, etc.

Having issues with anger or temper control can also make it difficult for your teen to establish healthy relationships with others, both as a teen and as an adult. It can lead to a dysfunctional home life or an abusive relationship depending on the severity of the anger, its cause, and whether your teen receives the help and intervention they need.

How you can help your teen manage their anger

Should your teen be experiencing any of the warning signs above, it's important to seek



help from an experienced professional who has success working with at-risk youth.

As parents, you can also do some things to help prevent situations from escalating and keep the energy in your home as calm as possible.

Avoid trying to control your teen

Trying to control your teen can result in even more anger or aggression. Even though teens still need safe boundaries, guidance, and consistency in enforcing rules from adults, having their say in some of the decisions that relate to their lives can go a long way. Rather than treating your teen like a young child, treating them like a young adult is important.

Talk to your teen in a businesslike manner

Do not yell at your teen or express a lot of "attitude" when dealing with them, as it may only escalate the situation. Talk to your teen like a business connection: without emotion, even-keeled, consistent, and matter-of-fact. This is especially important when setting and enforcing rules and boundaries.

Show respect for your teen's privacy

Privacy is important to teenagers, and while you want to ensure your teen stays safe, it's essential to show them the same respect for their privacy as another adult. Invading a teen's privacy can lead to mistrust and a tendency for them to conceal information in the future.

Listen and acknowledge your teen's emotions

When a teen is experiencing high emotions and feels misunderstood, it's essential to listen. Try to understand what your teen is going through and acknowledge those emotions.

Please do not ignore them or make your teen feel invalidated for what they're feeling. Failing to recognize your teen's emotions can add fuel to their fire of feeling misunderstood and powerless.

Offer your teen healthy coping strategies

When your teen is angry, they need to learn healthy ways of coping with their feelings. Offer your teen some healthy options, such as:

- Deep breathing exercises
- Guided meditation
- Yoga or exercise
- Sports or physical activities
- Journaling
- Adult coloring books
- Music or art
- Controlled activities such as throwing axes, breaking plates, boxing, etc.

Model healthy habits for your teen

If you want your teen to develop healthy methods of managing and expressing their emotions, it's important to model what that looks like. No person is perfect, and there will be times when we cannot always model ideal behavior for our teens, but the best examples of what it looks like to be a healthy, well-adjusted adult will go a long way toward developing youth.

Know when to step away

When your teen is angry, staying professional and businesslike is important. This includes refraining from snapping or yelling, which will only escalate the situation. Instead, set healthy limits and boundaries, speak professionally, and know when to step away and take a time out should things become too heated. These healthy habits to model for your teen will help prevent situations from growing out of control while lessening conflict in the home.

Set limits and boundaries for anger for your teen

When your teen is angry, set limits surrounding what is and is not an acceptable expression of that anger. These rules can include not throwing objects, breaking objects, swearing, verbally abusing another person, etc. Once these limits are set, be consistent in holding your teen accountable and have consequences if your teen fails to abide by those limits.

Don't micromanage or criticize your teen

While teens need managing, and a bit of constructive criticism can do a great deal of good, it's essential to refrain from being overly critical of your teen. They are in a delicate stage of development, and consistent criticism can hurt that development. It is also important to choose your battles and refrain from micromanaging. Having a teen who is angry and acting out may naturally cause you to want to tighten the reins and watch their every move, but this can cause them to act out more as their need for autonomy grows even stronger. Allow them opportunities to make their own choices when possible and enforce the consequences of rules they do not follow. No teen is perfect, and expecting them to be obedient 100% of the time is unrealistic. However, consistent consequences are an important learning tool.

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Spend quality time together and show a genuine interest in your teen's life

Even though it may not feel like this, your teen values your time and interest in their life. Make some time to do some of your favorite things together, and check in with your teen, as some of the things you enjoyed doing together when they were younger have likely



changed. Ask your teen if there are some new things that they'd like to do together. There could be a movie you could see together, a restaurant they'd like to try, an activity the two of you enjoy doing together, a place you'd both like to travel to on vacation, etc. Showing interest in your teen and their interests and hobbies holds a lot of power, as it can deepen your connection and help your teen feel understood and accepted. You may not always see eye to eye, but showing an interest in getting to know your son or daughter better is one of the most powerful, healing things a parent can do for their teen.

If the anger your teen feels is a symptom of a more serious issue such as depression, bipolar disorder, trauma, or substance abuse, our team will work with your family to form a treatment plan specially designed for your teen.