**Understanding Adolescent Defiance**

Defiance is an act of bold resistance to authority with open disregard and contempt. A child who exhibits defiant behavior is attempting to feel significant and a sense of control. Their goal is not to annoy, frustrate, or create a power struggle with adults even though it may feel like it to us. Parents never win power struggles with a child.

Avoiding power struggles is difficult for adolescent children who defy authority. The solution revolves around calmly working with the child in a way that honors a genuine need to feel significant. A critical component is still maintaining accountability to follow the expectations set forth by the parent at home. If you do lose your temper or negatively approach a situation, an apology is worth its weight in gold.

*Preventing Defiance*

The prevention of defiance may start with finding ways to give a child constructive ways to experience personal power and a feeling of significance.

**Potential Ideas:**

* Construct a Positive Relationship: Children who are defiant benefit from believing that you still care about them and actively include them in the home and their community.
  + All children possess positive attributes. Find them.
  + Learn about their interests and channel their talents to build on feeling a sense of significance.
* Strengthen Progress and Acknowledge Effort: Children who are defiant benefit from knowing they are making positive progress.
  + Acknowledge making large or small progress, even if it seems minor. Ideas could come through following directions or even a smooth transition into the home routines.
  + Reinforce the behavior by letting the child know you noticed, but do it privately to avoid calling attention to the child and inviting comparisons with siblings.
    - For example: "When you helped your sister this morning, that made her feel supported, good job!"
    - Avoid the phrases that start with “*I like, I appreciate, I want,*” when reinforcing positive behaviors. Defiant children are sensitive to being told what to do and may feel manipulated by “I” statements.
* Teach How to Disagree Respectfully: Children who struggle with authority may lack the skill of respectful disagreement. Empowering children to speak up respectfully, which is how our democratic society functions, is a lifelong tool. Of course, allowing children to disagree doesn’t mean accepting all forms of disagreement. Part of becoming a contributing member of a democratic society is learning how to disagree respectfully.
  + When teaching children appropriate ways to disagree, make clear that at the moment they still need to follow directions and rules. Let them know that later they can discuss what they think was unfair and what should be changed.
  + Teach children safe and respectful ways to show their disagreement, such as using respectful words and phrases like “I feel that” and “I suggest,” or writing a letter to you. Model these methods before expecting children to use them.
* Capitalize on the Child’s Voice: Children who are savvy with challenging authority are often skillful with finding holes in a particular stance. Use these adept skills in a positive direction to work towards a bigger cause. Offer opportunities like writing letters to a newspaper, community service projects, or researching an environmental issue. This may help a child feel in control and significant, while using their voice in a positive directions.
* Supportive Suggestions when a child is defiant: When a child is being defiant, avoid creating more resistance and still maintain safety at your home. Do not push the child’s 'buttons.'
  + Reasoning or making an emotional appeal with the child is **not** the course of action to take while amid defiance.
  + If safety allows, slow down the situation and allow time for the child to regain their composure. Stay calm and give wait time to your reasonable request.
  + After the situation, reflect and record the incident with the child. A pattern or triggers may arise with the defiant behavior. Identifying a potential trend of child’s defiant behavior may take some time but could support other family members who interact with the child as well.
  + When we begin to see a pattern and/or triggers to a child’s defiant behavior, we should respond with respectful reminders and redirections. Do **not** wait to address a defiant trigger, we want to avoid a child ‘digging their heels in.”
  + Defiant children are sensitive to being told what to do so remember to be brief and avoid sarcasm along with lectures. Use short, concise instructions, and avoid questions. Keep your body language neutral and potentially use of limited acceptable choices. This is not a time to negotiate.
  + Once the reminder, redirection, and/or consequence are given, allow time and space for it to occur along with the child following the expectation. You can also refer to a list of posted expectations on your refrigerator or they room to ‘third eye’ the request. Children have difficulty arguing with a list of expectations they build with you, paper does not verbally engage in the argument.

**Golden Nuggets**

Defiant children may make us feel frustrated or even angry at times. We must find a way to rise above our feelings and appreciate our child by guiding them beyond their defiance.