There are several similar ways at-risk youth and youth involved with the juvenile justice system behave. It is important to know what these behaviors might mean so you can understand and help your child.

DEPRESSION
The difficult teenage years are even harder when families have challenges, such as uncontrolled anger, physical or mental health problems and divorce. Your child may turn his anger inward and spend more time withdrawn from his friends and usual interests. This may result in depression — the most common teen psychological problem.

**TIP:** Even if your child is not showing concerning changes in his behavior, talk with him about how it is natural to feel upset at times. Encourage him to join friends in positive activities or express his feelings.

AGGRESSION
A youth who is aggressive often thinks everyone else is aggressive too. He thinks others are challenging him even when they are not. As a result, he may react defensively and bully or fight others and damage property.

**TIP:** Help your child think about other things people mean by their facial expression or words: “What if Jeff just said that because he was scared?” Get your child to express his feelings through words, not actions that may make the situation worse.

Many aggressive youth also think they are better than others. Despite any failures, they believe they are superior to others. When this belief is challenged, they may react with anger.

**TIP:** Help your child see how nobody is perfect—even you and him. Say, “I learn so much from others and realize how I can be better.” Then give an example.

Most aggressive youth feel badly for their actions. However, they typically blame the victim: “He had it coming because he acted like such a jerk.”

**TIP:** Discuss what the victim actually did and how your child could have reacted differently. Ask, “How did your actions make the situation better?”

Also, for children ages 6-11, see if there is a SNAP (Stop Now and Plan) program offered by DJJ in your area.

Call: ___________________________