THRIVE EMERGE

WHEN NOTHING SEEMS TO WORK: A PARENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

If motivating your teen feels harder than it "should," you're not alone--and you're not failing.

Many parents of anxious, avoidant, or neurodivergent teens are doing *everything they were taught to do*: explaining, reminding, encouraging, setting limits, offering consequences. And yet... nothing seems to stick. Or worse, things escalate into shutdowns, meltdowns, or total disengagement.

Before we talk about *new* strategies, it helps to pause and take stock of what's already happening.

STEP 1: NOTICE YOUR CURRENT STRUGGLE

Take a moment to reflect on the situations that feel most stuck right now.

Ask yourself:

- Where do I feel the most resistance from my teen?
    - Schoolwork?
    - Mornings or bedtime?
    - Electronics?
    - Hygiene or self-care?
    - Leaving the house or trying something new?
- When I think about these moments, what emotion comes up first for me?
    - Frustration
    - Worry
    - Urgency
    - Helplessness
    - Fear about the future

Often, the intensity of *our* feelings is the first clue that a power struggle is brewing.

STEP 2: HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY RESPOND?

When your teen resists or shuts down, which of these sound familiar?

- I explain again--more clearly, more logically

- I increase urgency ("We don't have time for this")
- I lecture, hoping it will finally click
- I remind them of consequences or long-term outcomes
- I jump into problem-solving mode
- I back off completely to avoid a blow-up

None of these responses mean you're doing something "wrong."
They mean you're trying to get movement in a system that feels jammed.

But it's worth asking:

Which of these responses actually reduces resistance?

Which ones tend to escalate, prolong, or exhaust everyone involved?

STEP 3: WHAT HAS *ACTUALLY* WORKED--EVEN A LITTLE?

Instead of focusing only on what's not working, look for small exceptions.

Ask yourself:

- When *has* my teen been more cooperative or engaged?
- What was different in that moment?
    - Was I calmer?
    - Was the task smaller?
    - Was there less pressure or urgency?
    - Did they feel more in control?

Motivation often shows up in tiny windows--not because the teen suddenly "tried harder," but because the demand felt manageable and the nervous system felt safer.

These moments matter more than we think.

STEP 4: WHAT *DOESN'T* WORK--BUT YOU KEEP TRYING?

Many parents notice they return to strategies that *used* to work or *seem* like they should work:

- Repeating myself louder or more firmly
- Adding more consequences
- Giving long explanations
- Pointing out inconsistencies ("You did this yesterday!")
- Framing things as "just a choice"

If these approaches lead to:

- Shutdown
- Avoidance
- Emotional explosions
- Or short-term compliance followed by burnout

...it's not because your teen is oppositional.
It's because motivation doesn't grow under threat, pressure, or overwhelm.

STEP 5: WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO IMPROVE?

Instead of asking, *"How do I make my teen cooperate?"*
Try reframing the goal:

- How can I reduce resistance?
- How can I create movement without meltdowns?
- How can I set limits without triggering shutdown?
- How can I shift from pushing to inviting momentum?

Small shifts in **how we communicate**, **how we structure expectations**, and **how we define success** can change the entire family pattern.

A GENTLE REFRAME

If motivation feels impossible right now, it doesn't mean your teen lacks drive.

It usually means:

- The nervous system is overloaded
- Executive function is bottlenecked
- The task feels too big, too risky, or too exposing

And that's something parents *can* work with--without power struggles.

WHAT'S NEXT

In our upcoming focus on **Motivation Without Meltdowns**, we'll explore:

- Communication that lowers resistance instead of triggering it
- How to ask questions that build internal motivation
- Why micro-tasks create more momentum than big demands
- How to address electronics, avoidance, and numbing behaviors with empathy *and* limits

This work isn't about controlling your teen.
It's about **unjamming the system--together**.