



# Children's Mental Health Matters!

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## Facts for Families Strategies to Deal with Aggressive Children

### Definition

Aggressive behavior is reactionary and impulsive behavior that often results in breaking household rules or the law; aggressive behavior is violent and unpredictable.

### Why Do We Care?

- Children may go through a brief period of aggressive behavior if they are worried, tired, or stressed. If the behavior continues for more than a few weeks, parents should talk to the pediatrician. If it becomes a daily pattern for more than three to six months, it could be a serious problem.
- When children lose their sense of connection to others, they may feel tense, frightened, or isolated. These are the times when they may unintentionally lash out at other children, even children to whom they are close.

### What Do We Do About It?

- Parents can control the aggressive child in various ways. They should intervene quickly but calmly to interrupt the aggression and prevent their child from hurting another child. Younger children may need a time-out to calm down and before rejoining a group. Simple rules about appropriate behavior are easier for a child to understand than lengthy explanations. Parents can affirm feelings while stressing that all feelings cannot be acted upon.
- Parents can reach older children with eye contact, a stern voice, and appropriate physical contact, such as placing a hand gently on the shoulder. Older children can be told that they need to learn a better way to handle conflicts. Parents can suggest that, for instance, the child ask an adult to intervene before lashing out at a classmate. Any disciplinary measures should be explained as a simple consequence to the child's aggression.
- When parents arrive after conflict occurs, it may be useful to listen to the child's explanation. Having a parent listen can encourage the child to develop trust in the parent.

- Parents should not expect the aggressive child to be reasonable when he or she is upset. The child may need time to calm down. Sometimes the child may feel trapped and may need adult support. Parents should encourage the aggressive child to come to them when they are upset, hopefully before violence occurs.

*(Copied from Health of Children, Aggressive Behavior: Provide definitions, prevention strategies, and parent concerns. <http://www.healthofchildren.com/A/Aggressive-Behavior.html>)*

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### Resources/Links

Aggressive Behavior  
Provides definitions, prevention strategies, and parent concerns: <http://www.healthofchildren.com/A/Aggressive-Behavior.html>

American Academy of Adolescent and Child Psychiatry - Understanding Violent Behavior in Children:  
[http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts\\_for\\_families/understanding\\_violent\\_behavior\\_in\\_children\\_and\\_adolescents](http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/understanding_violent_behavior_in_children_and_adolescents)

Hand in Hand helps parents acquire the skills they need to build and rebuild close connections with their children. <http://www.handinhandparenting.org/>

Magellan Health Services, Aggression and Cooperation: Helping Young Children Develop Constructive Strategies  
<http://www.magellanassist.com/mem/library/default.asp?url=%2E%5Cwpo%5Cwpo%5F00000100%5Cwpo%5F00000101%2Ehtml&title=Aggression+and+Cooperation%3A+Helping+Young+Children+Develop+Constructive+Strategies>

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