

# Children's Mental Health Matters!

a Maryland public awareness campaign

## Facts For Educators

### Aggressive Behaviors

Aggressive, negative, defiant, destructive, or hostile behavior may be symptoms of ADHD co-occurring with disruptive behavior disorders, such as oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder. Aggression has different components: **verbal** (e.g. insults or threats), **behavioral** (e.g. pounding, throwing things, or violating personal space), and **emotional** (e.g. raised voice or looks angry). What is seen as aggression can vary between individuals and across cultures. If you are concerned that a young person is becoming aggressive, you need to take steps to protect yourself and others. A child may not be able to explain that the aggressive behavior is related to a mental health challenge, disorder, or severe emotional distress. Sometimes, aggression takes the form of instigating a fight, sometimes the child simply provokes others to fight, or antagonizes and threatens other children. These children, often referred to as "bullies," usually have few true friends, poor social skills, and little self-confidence.

#### What causes aggression in children?

The aggressor will rarely have self-confidence and gains it through aggressive behavior. Aggressors are attention seekers and they enjoy the attention they gain from being aggressive. Power brings attention and the aggressor has learned this. Due to the child's weaker self-image and the fact that he or she doesn't fit in, they try aggressive behavior and soon become leaders, even though they usually know that they are behaving inappropriately.

#### What can educators do about it?

- Never ignore inappropriate aggressions and do not get drawn into a power struggle with the aggressor
- Be firm but gentle in your approach. Remember, the aggressor can handle the tough side of you, but he/she will succumb to gentleness and it's really what he/she wants - the right kind of attention.
- Deal one to one with the aggressor and devise a plan for him/her to take control of his/her behavior. See behavior contracts in below resources included.
- Successful teachers know that when they establish a one to one relationship with the aggressor, success soon follows. Remember,

the aggressor can usually tell if you genuinely like him/her. Be genuine, this child merely needs attention.

- Provide opportunities for this child to act appropriately and get some badly needed attention. Give him/her responsibilities and provide praise.
- Catch the aggressor behaving well and provide immediate, positive feedback. In time, you will see that the aggressive behaviors will start to diminish.
- Provide him/her with activities that bring forth leadership in a positive way. Always let him/her know that you care, trust and respect him. Remind him/her that it's the inappropriate behaviors that you don't like.
- Provide as many methods as you can for this child to take ownership for his/her inappropriate behavior.
- Probe him/her with how an issue should have been handled and how will it be handled next time.

Never forget that ALL children need to know you care about them and that they can contribute in a positive way. It took the child a long time to become a master of aggressive behavior. Be consistent, patient and understand that change will take time. (Copied from: <http://special.ed.about.com/cs/behaviordisorders/a/aggression.htm>)

Children's  
Mental  
Health  
Matters.org

A MARYLAND PUBLIC  
AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

coordinated by

mhamd   
MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF MARYLAND

MCF  
maryland coalition of families

## **Resources/Links**

### **Behavior Contracts**

<http://special.ed.about.com/cs/behaviordisorders/a/behaviorcontrac.htm>

### **American Academy of Adolescent and Child Psychiatry, Understanding Violent Behavior in Children:**

[https://www.aacap.org/App\\_Themes/AACAP/docs/facts\\_for\\_families/55\\_understanding\\_violent\\_behavior\\_in\\_children\\_and\\_adolscents.pdf](https://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/docs/facts_for_families/55_understanding_violent_behavior_in_children_and_adolscents.pdf)

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

### **Effective Strategies to Address Disruptive Behaviors. Developed by Faculty and Staff of The University of Maryland School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, Center for School Mental Health**

<http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/PowerPoints/disruptive%20students%20with%20notes.ppt>

*Adapted from Resources found on:  
[www.schoolmentalhealth.org](http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org)  
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MHAMD ~ 443-901-1550 ~ [www.mhamd.org](http://www.mhamd.org)

MCF ~ 410-730-8267 ~ [www.mdcoalition.org](http://www.mdcoalition.org)

The Children's Mental Health Matters! Campaign is a collaboration of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) and the Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) with support from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene - Behavioral Health Administration. The Campaign goal, with over 250 partners and schools across the state, is to raise public awareness of the importance of children's mental health. For more information, please visit [www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org](http://www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org).