



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 they don'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 they will succumb to gentleness and it's really what they want - the right kind of attention.
- Deal one-to-one with the aggressor and devise a plan for them to take control of their 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 them. Be genuine, this child merely needs attention.

- Provide opportunities for this child to act appropriately and get some badly needed attention. Give them 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 them with activities that bring forth leadership in a positive way. Always let them know that you care, trust, and respect them. Remind them 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 their inappropriate behavior.
- Probe them 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.

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Resource Links

Behavior Contracts

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

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

http://www.aacap.org/aacap/fffprint/article_print.aspx?dn=Understanding-Violent-Behavior-In-Children-and-Adolescents-055

Aggressive Behavior – Encyclopedia of Children's Health Provides definitions, prevention strategies, and parent concerns

<http://www.healthofchildren.com/A/Aggressive-Behavior.html>

Addressing Classroom Disruption and Threatening Behavior

<https://tltc.umd.edu/disruptive-demanding-or-threatening-student-behavior>

Breaking the Behavior Code – How teachers can read and respond more effectively to disruptive students

<https://childmind.org/article/breaking-behavior-code/>

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