

## Understanding Aggression\*

What sorts of behaviors are considered aggressive?

- Fighting
- Bullying
- Refusal
- Rule violation
- Disruptiveness
- Et cetera

Where does aggression come from?

While there may be a temperament aspect to aggression, a good deal of research has indicated that aggressive behavior is learned. There are multiple settings where children may see that “might makes right,” and may find that there is great reward and little consequence for aggressive acts.

- Home – coercive parenting
- School – aggressive peers, coercive teacher discipline
- Media – increasing evidence that violence in the media influences child behavior

Faulty thinking that often underlies aggressive behavior:

- *Self-centered thinking* – “If I see something I like, I take it.” “If I want to do something, I don’t care if it’s against the rules.”
- *Minimizing/mislabeling* – Aggressive individuals often downplay the effects of their actions or rationalize their actions as something other than what they are.
- *Assuming the worst* – Aggressive individuals often believe the worst outcome is likely unless they act aggressively (“If I don’t hit him, I’ll look like a wimp.”)
- *Blaming others* – Aggressive individuals often believe others have instigated their actions.
- *False consensus* – Aggressive individuals often believe that others will act as they have.

Some interventions—most often in combination—that might be used to target aggressive behavior:

- Social skills development – Aggressive individuals often lack alternative behaviors
- Anger control training – A number of aggressive individuals have trouble understanding and modulating their emotions
- Problem solving – Aggressive individuals often benefit from increased opportunity to reason through social dilemmas

An important distinction: *Proactive* versus *reactive* aggression.

- This distinction speaks to the deficits that might underlie aggressive behaviors and the types of interventions that should then be employed.

\*Information taken from *Aggression Replacement Training* (Goldstein, Glick, & Gibbs, 1998).