

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Why are children aggressive?

Anger is a normal human emotion. Children often cannot tell us what makes them angry, and instead display their frustration in the form of aggressive behaviour. Sometimes, children can be aggressive due to underlying anxiety, which builds up and then is released suddenly.

Children are often aggressive because they experience and witness aggression in their environment. The most influential source of modeling aggression for the child is the parent. Verbal aggression (arguing, threatening, and yelling) in parents, even in the absence of physical aggression, has been linked to aggression in children.

There are many contributing environmental factors that impact the expression of aggressive behavior in children. Some factors such as school difficulties, unavailable mental health services, and economic inequality may not be under a parent's control to change. Other factors that can be influenced by parental action include exposure to violent media, community violence, guns in the home, and association with aggressive peers.

How to manage aggressive behaviour?

1. Do not spank your child. The Canadian Pediatric Society, including the pediatricians who work here, strongly discourage any form of physical punishment.
2. Avoid verbal aggression, including arguing, threatening and yelling. Respond to your child in a calm manner, especially with a soothing tone of voice. This also helps prevent the situation from escalating.
3. Take a break from the situation. If it is safe to do so, walk away. This will not only allow you time to compose yourself, but also give your child some time to calm down.
4. Try to identify the trigger. Why is that your child is being aggressive? They may be trying to avoid a disliked task or to try and get something they want.
5. Don't give into their demands. Although it may shorten the aggressive episode, giving up and letting them have it will only reinforce the aggressive behavior.
6. Change your expectations. Demanding perfect behaviour can be hard for a child. Decide what you can "live with" and what you'd like to try to change.
7. Ensure your child is eating regular meals, has proper sleep, and regular physical activity will also help them regulate their emotions. You should also reduce their screen time, and avoid all violent media including video games.