

SOCIAL AGGRESSION: What Every Parent Needs To Know

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A. INTRODUCTION: The wrong lessons we learned about aggression.

- **Television:** Sit-coms teach us that if someone insults us, we come back with a bigger insult. It's entertaining, but in real life it makes it worse.
- **Movies:** Movies teach us to bully the bully, or get even. *Revenge of the Nerds*, Horror movies like *Carrie*, etc. In real life this doesn't work and could lead to serious consequences.
- **Music:** We grew up with songs like *Coward of the County* – Kenny Rogers, *Bad, Bad Leroy Brown* – Jim Croce. The message is you have to beat someone up when they bother you.
- **Advertising:** The old Charles Atlas ad that was in every comic book for years. The message – get big muscles and beat up the aggressor.

B. Social Aggression:

- Social aggression is when an individual or a group socially harasses, isolates or intimidates a person or persons deliberately.
- Social aggression is bullying if it is repeated over time. Cyber bullying is a form of social aggression.

C. Bullying:

- Someone deliberately hurting or frightening someone weaker over a period of time.
- Bullying can be Verbal (threatening, humiliating, or degrading comments), or it can be Physical (hitting, pushing, holding or hostile gesturing).
- Bullying is not when two people of equal power or strength have a fight or quarrel (Peterson & Rigby, 1999)

D. What is a Victim?

- A victim is defined as an individual who is exposed repeatedly to bullying behaviors on the part of one or more persons (Olweus, 1993).

E. Talk about social aggression with your child:

- Use opportunities like movies, television and books to discuss what is real and what is entertainment. Ask your child what would happen in real life in those situations?
- Ask you child to come up with a better more realistic solution.
- Talk to your child about when they should report something to an adult.
- **Don't call the parent** of the aggressor unless everything else has failed. Give your child support and strategies so **he/she** can make the situation better. They will learn valuable life skills and become more resilient.

F. Teach your child what they can do to help themselves and others:

- A.** Refuse to be a part of the aggression. Don't laugh at what the aggressor says or the victim will think you are siding with the aggressor.
- B.** Don't retaliate, or fight fire with fire. In most cases it will make the situation worse, but if it does stop the aggression, then you probably taught the aggressor how to be a better bully to someone else.

C. Support the victim

- Invite the victim to sit or stand with you.
- Tell the victim that nobody really listens to what the aggressor says.

D. If the aggressor is a friend, talk to him/her and tell them what they are doing is not cool.

E. Confront the aggressor. Tell them to cut it out, or that nobody likes it when he/she does that. Don't tell the aggressor to "please stop." He/she will continue just to spite you.

F. Enlist the support of others. Ask other people to join in with you. Unity is power.

G. Report it to an adult when it is dangerous or the situation continues to get worse.

G. Understanding Conflict

1. Accept that conflict is part of life and not always a bad thing.
2. Learning to deal with conflict appropriately will make your life easier.
3. Fighting fire with fire almost always makes a bigger fire.
4. No one can be a victim unless they choose to be one.

H. Conflict Resolution Skills (General Rules)

- **DO NOT RETALIATE:** Don't do to them what they did to you. It might make you feel better for a moment, but it will make the situation worse.
- **STAY CALM:** That person may be bothering you because they know it makes you mad. They may be taking out their anger or frustration on you. If you react with anger, you may be giving that person exactly what they want. If someone calls you stupid, it doesn't make you stupid.
- **TRY TO TALK ABOUT IT:** If the person bothering you is a friend, then maybe he/she is upset about something you did. Ask them, "Did I do something that upset you, I thought we were friends?"
- **DON'T TELL THEM TO STOP, IT USUALLY DOESN'T WORK:** Instead, tell them that you don't like what they are doing or that it is annoying to you. If they continue, let them know that you are not going to put up with it.
- **TELL AN ADULT IF THE SITUATION CONTINUES:** This is reporting, not tattling. It is standing up for your rights. No one has the right to bother you; so getting help from an adult is the right thing to do.

Specific Rules for Arguing

1. No name-calling, put-downs or labels.
2. Fight to clear the air, not to win.
3. Use "I statements" not "Blaming Statements."
4. Stay calm and listen to the other person.
5. Stick to the present. Don't bring up past problems.
6. Don't gang up on one person.

Using the "I feel statement" to resolve conflict

1. **I FEEL:** When you _____, I feel _____, because *(optional)* _____ The individual takes responsibility for his/her own reaction. The other person is not put on the defensive.
2. **BLAMING:** You make me feel _____. You are so _____ The other person is blamed for the your reaction. It puts them on the defensive.

I. Types of Social Aggression

1. **IGNORING:** When A friend is not talking to you and don't know why.
2. **ISOLATING:** When a friend tells you not to talk to someone because he/she is mad at that person.
3. **DENYING:** When a friend is ignoring you and when you ask them why, they tell you they are not mad at you.
4. **TRASHING:** When someone talks about you behind your back and says mean things, starts rumors or reveals secrets that were shared.
5. **NASTY LOOKS:** When someone gives you a mean look, looks at you and laughs with others, or rolls their eyes at you and looks away.
6. **PUT DOWNS:** When someone says mean things to you or about you in front of other people.
7. **SARCASM:** When someone gives you a put down and then says, "Just kidding" or "Can't you take a joke."

J. Specific ways to handle social aggression appropriately

1. IGNORING:

- Tell the person that you can see that they are upset with you and that you would like to talk about it because you value their friendship.
- If they deny it, tell them that you are ready to listen when they are ready to talk about it.

2. ISOLATING:

- When a friend tells you not to talk to someone, tell him/her that you would never ask him/her to do that.
- Suggest that they work that problem out with the person they are mad at and keep you out of it.
- Don't get in the middle of the situation.

3. DENYING:

- Tell the person that action speaks louder than words, and you clearly see that they are upset with you.
- Tell them that you value their friendship and are willing to talk about the problem when they are ready.
- Give them some time to come around.

4. TRASHING:

- Tell the person who is trashing someone that it makes you uncomfortable when they do that.
- If the person being "trashed" is your friend, let the person who is putting them down know that.
- Change the subject.
- Don't tell the person who is being trashed that it is happening. When you do that, it puts them in an awkward position and they may get mad at you.
- Don't trash the trasher.

5. NASTY LOOKS:

- Act like it doesn't bother you. Don't give them the satisfaction of believing that it bothers you.
- Ask the person giving you the nasty look if they want to talk about the problem.

6. PUT DOWNS:

- Don't retaliate with another put down. This only makes the situation worse and the person feels justified in putting you down.
- If you feel you need to say something try something like:
 - "That really hurt, or that was really mean." (Honest reaction)
 - "Did I do something to upset you?"

7. SARCASM:

- Tell them that you recognize what they are doing. For example: "You are using sarcasm to put me down and I don't appreciate it." Or, "That was not funny, that was hurtful."

J. Cyberbullying: A growing problem

The most common types of cyber bullying are "trashing" of individuals using e-mails, blogs, my-space or other public sites. When this happens it is very difficult for your child to handle. Make them aware of this form of social aggression and provide them with guidelines.

- Never give out your password to anyone (not even your best friend).
- Never trash or put down someone on the Internet.
- Don't curse or swear on the Internet. If someone is being nasty or swearing at you, do not retaliate. Block them and cut off any communication.
- Tell mom or dad if someone is mean or nasty to you on the Internet.
- If someone is making an actual threat, contact the authorities and your Internet provider.

K. Internet Safety Recommendations:

- Don't put your computer in an area that is isolated (never in your child's bedroom).
- Limit the amount of time your child spends on the Internet.
- Always be nearby when your child is on the Internet.
- Purchase programs that restrict times the Internet is on and restrict inappropriate materials.
- Talk to your child about predators.
- Tell your child that they need to think about how the person they are writing to will react to what they are saying.
- Check to see what sites your child has visited.

RULES FOR ARGUING

Arguments can be healthy and constructive if you follow the rules.
Even if you are unable to follow ALL the rules, you will have a healthier argument
if you follow as many rules as possible.

- 1. No name-calling, put-downs or labels.**
- 2. Fight to clear the air, not to win.**
- 3. Use “I statements” not “Blaming Statements.”**
- 4. Stay calm and listen to the other person.**
- 5. Stick to the present. Don’t bring up past problems.**
- 6. Don’t gang up on one person.**

Hang this up on your wall or refrigerator and look it over the next time you are upset with someone. Try your best to follow the rules when you argue, even if the other person doesn’t follow the rules, and you will have a healthier argument.