

DIFFUSING THE SITUATION: TIPS FOR FAMILIES

Understanding aggression

There isn't a simple reason to explain why someone behaves aggressively. However, we do know that it takes a team to support youth and families who are struggling with aggressive behavior.

SAFETY FIRST

Get help as quickly as possible if a young person threatens to damage or destroy property; or hurt or kill himself or herself or someone else.

Tips for diffusing the situation

- **Control your body language and tone of voice.** Make sure your body language and tone of voice do not contradict your verbal message.
- **Stay calm.** Focus on letting the person know that you care about him or her, are concerned about what is happening and are there to help. Don't try to solve the problem in the moment while the young person is acting aggressively toward you.
- **Offer a way out.** Give clear choices, with safe limitations. In this way, you allow the young person to retain a feeling of control along with his or her self-esteem.
- **Discourage bystanders.** When a young person is acting out, ask peers who may be watching to leave the setting and continue with their activities.
- **Don't make threats.** Don't give warnings about consequences that you are not prepared to follow through on or that are unreasonably severe.
- **Don't make generalizations.** Saying, "You always do this when ..." reinforces negative behaviors.
- **Wait for the right moment.** Wait until after an incident involving aggression is over, when everyone has calmed down, to talk to a young person about inappropriate behaviors.
- **Maintain safety.** Make sure that everyone present during an incident is safe at all times. If you can't control the situation, call for help.
- **Deal appropriately with threats made by youth.** In most cases, children or youth who make threats don't carry them out. Your main goal will be to get a young person making threats to focus on the way he or she is feeling, and to keep them away from any target of aggression.

When is aggression a concern?

If you are trying to determine if your loved one has a serious problem with aggression, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does this behavior occur regularly (every day, every week or every month)?
- Has it been happening for a long time?
- Are you concerned about the young person's behavior for any other reasons besides aggression?
- Does the aggression persist or appear to be getting worse?
- Do explosions happen at times that don't bother other young people—or for no **obvious** reason?
- Is it difficult to calm the young person down after an outburst?
- Has the young person injured himself or herself or anyone else?
- Does the behavior lead to conflicts with parents, siblings, peers or teachers? Do friends also behave aggressively or anti-socially?

The earlier a young person with an aggression problem is identified and receives help, the greater the chance that the chosen treatment will have lasting benefits

Source: Adapted from camh.ca/en/health-info/guides-and-publications/aggressive-behaviour-in-children-and-youth

Getting help

Maybe you suspect that your young person may have an aggression problem requiring special help. Your primary care provider can help with assessment or referral to a mental health provider for additional support. There are many strategies proven to help.