

AGGRESSION

Aggression is a common behaviour in early childhood. Like all behaviour, it is a form of communication. It can be complex and may come from different underlying causes. Understanding what leads to aggression and having strategies ready can help you support children before, during, and after these moments.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or concerned, please reach out to CCRR staff or explore the resources at the bottom of this guide.

Supporting Children Experiencing Aggression

When you see aggression building:

- Removal. Gently remove the child from the situation.
- Connection. Have focused time together (e.g., hugging, reading a book, doing another activity).
- Pause what you're doing and be fully present when possible.
- Be clear in your communication. Use simple language and clear statements.
- Redirection. Direct their energy towards a physical outlet, such as:
 1. Roughhousing playfully with an adult.
 2. Jumping on the bed or trampoline.
 3. Throwing soft balls into a laundry basket.
 4. Running or other outdoor activities.

In the moment:

- Avoid threats or bribes (e.g., "I will get you ice cream if you stop. ").
- Stay calm. If you need to physically intervene, move slowly and use a gentle tone.
- Stay with the child. You want them to know that their emotions are not too big for you. If they need space, give it while staying nearby and emotionally available. Reassure them that you are there when they are ready.

After the aggression:

- Reflect. Talk about what happened in a calm, non-judgmental way. Use matter-of-fact language and acknowledge how the child may be feeling (if this is not triggering for them).
- Problem solve. Talk about what to do in that situation next time. Don't just instruct; ask and listen to the child's ideas.
- Reassure. Children often feel shame after aggressive moments. This is an important time for them to have connection and reassurance of their self-worth and your unconditional love.

Aggression is complex. What works for one child may not work for another. What works in one moment may not work in another. Understanding a child's sensory needs, observing patterns, and developing preventative strategies can make a big difference.

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How to Support Yourself

An important part of supporting children with aggressive behaviours is learning to regulate yourself. When your child is acting aggressively, take a moment to ground yourself (when safe) so you can respond rather than react. This can be as simple as taking a deep breath.

See the Caregiver Self-Regulation resource guide for additional strategies in high-stress situations.

Need More Support?

Local Resources:

- Family Physicians, Pediatricians, or Nurse Practitioners
- Public Health Nurse
- Child Development Therapy Supports
- Counsellors (e.g., Child & Youth Mental Health)
- Art Therapists

Books Available at WKCCRR Library:

- The Explosive Child by Dr. Ross W. Greene
- Parenting Right from the Start by Dr. Vanessa Lapointe
- Discipline Without Damage by Dr. Vanessa Lapointe

Podcasts:

- Kelty Mental Health – Parenting Kids with Challenging Behaviours

Online Resources:

- Aggressive Behaviour in Children and Youth – Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
- Aggressive Behaviour in Children – Neuro Launch
- My Child Has Outbursts, Anger, and Aggression – Kelty Mental Health
- The Anger Iceberg