

Aggressive Behaviour

Yvonne Williams, Teacher, Greaves Adventist Academy, Montreal, QC

Looking back over the school year and the many challenges we encountered, many of us as teachers can place a finger aside our cheek and ponder how we made it through. Was it by trial and error, did we make it through by chance, did we utilize some good fail proof strategies, or was it divine intervention? I think it would be safe to say that it was all of the above.

I remember beginning the school year with vigor and enthusiasm. This is going to be a great year, I told myself. Then half way through the year, I began to wonder “will I survive till the end?” Aggression seems to have been the number one issue that we faced as we battle the many disciplinary problems. Aggression aimed at students and at times at teachers.

After much reflection, it would be safe to say that poor social skills were huge problems this year. Wait a minute; we are educators, therefore we must now stop and evaluate the situation and try to look at the many possible causes of aggression in our students. Some experts say that developmental delays, biological abnormalities, environmental issues, feelings of helplessness and the thought that aggressive behavior can bring power and control, are all contributors. Others conclude that aggressive behavior is learned and is often reinforced at home.

Therefore, armed with this vast reservoir of knowledge, where do we go from here? Send them to the expert: the school councilor or social worker... Oops!.. We don't have one... Right there and then I began to reflect upon the words of Tom Kinney; “Inadequate social skills not only lead to unhappy and often lonely children, they have a measurable impact on academic achievement.”

I decided that teaching directly and concretely acceptable ways of expressing anger was critical. Yelling, hitting, throwing things and actions of that nature are unacceptable methods of dealing with anger and frustration, it just wasn't going to work.

Such behaviors find their source in the emotion of anger, which can motivate some students to become abusers or aggressors towards others. If the behavior is not controlled or eliminated it may lead to serious consequences in the future.

In our schools, aggressive behaviors are demonstrated in many forms: for example, bullying, teasing, taxing, hostility towards teachers, defiance against authority, and insubordination.

In a recent study, it was found that what really hurts others is not just the physical pain but the emotional ones as well. In one school, some students commented about their emotional pain by saying “it hurts when I am called names, when I am put down, the teasing and how I am ignored.” (Hazler, Hoover and Oliver 1992)

Some students believe that school administrators, teachers and staff members are not addressing the issues seriously. What can be done or what can be suggested to help curb aggressive behaviors? In our school, we meet together at least twice per month to address these issues and then try to find the best possible ways of solving them. Perhaps some of the following tried and true methods and hints may be helpful in your school.

- Teach students the difference between aggression and assertiveness, through creative drama and role play as they rehearse positive ways to meet the challenge of a bully on the playground. (Campbell, p.75)
- To teach children how to be kind and considerate we must seek to be more understanding than moralizing. This attitude might help them say “no” to unacceptable behavior. (Marks, p.307)
- Get parents on your side. This will help strengthen the connection between home and school. (Harzler, Hoover, Oliver p.22) When this was achieved in the case of the single mother, there was marked improvement in her son’s behavior. (Mordock, p.25)
- Provide counseling services for bullies and victims. (Harzler, Hoover, Oliver, p.22) Eric was helped by using this service.
- Prepare your professional staff to take a clear consistent and professional stand on the issues of bullying and victimization both inside and outside of school. (Harzler, Hoover, Oliver p.22)

Conclusion

In my experience as an educator, I have encountered many of these aggressions. As I consulted and conference with students, I have discovered that many act out from frustration with their home environment, school failure, a desire to be popular, and lack of self-confidence to deal with issues. Unfortunately, some schools do not have the resources to deal effectively with these problems. What do we do then? In my opinion, the best that we can, with what we have.