

Aggression in Young Children

Aggression is defined as a hostile action **intended to harm**.



Age 18 months–about 4 years:

At this stage of development, children are easily frustrated. They are concerned with ownership rights and possession.

- Aggression is most often object oriented.
- This is called instrumental aggression.
- It is directed at obtaining something.

EXAMPLES OF INSTRUMENTAL AGGRESSION ARE:

- Hitting a child to get the cookie.
- Pushing a child down to get to play with the wagon.
- Grabbing a doll away from another child.
- Pushing someone out of the way to be first in line.

At these next stages of development, children gain the cognitive and verbal skills to enable new forms of aggressive behavior. The consequences of aggressive behavior at this stage are critical. If the aggressive behavior is positively reinforced, it can strengthen the frequency or intensity of the behavior, or both.

- Although instrumental (object-oriented) aggression still exist at these ages, aggression becomes person-oriented.
- This is called hostile (relational) aggression.
- It is aimed at hurting another person to get dominance or revenge.

EXAMPLES OF HOSTILE AGGRESSION ARE:

- Beating up a child who won't do what the aggressor wants (dominance).
- Destroying a sibling's earphones because the sibling won't let the child listen to the radio or a CD (revenge).

For more about ACT, visit
www.ActAgainstViolence.org

