



# Angry Kids Frustrated Parents

Practical Ways to  
Prevent and Reduce  
Aggression in  
Your Children

Terry L. Hyland  
Jerry Davis, Ph.D.

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# Introduction

**P**hillip has a reputation as a bad kid. In his neighborhood, he constantly beats up on the smaller kids, throws rocks at people's houses, and curses when things don't go his way. He's also been caught slashing car tires. At school, he's been in trouble for stealing from other students and fighting. Lately, Phillip has been hitting and kicking his younger brother and sister, and both of them are afraid to be around him.

Phillip usually denies doing anything wrong when he gets caught. But as soon as he sees there's no way to avoid being punished, he'll say he's sorry and promise to be good. A few days will pass with no problems. Then the aggressive behaviors start again. This has been going on for six months.

*Phillip is 15 years old. What would you do if he was your son?*



Every parent has seen his or her child hit, push, yell at, take something from, pick on, or fight with another child. It's the way children – especially young children – get what they want before they learn more positive ways of getting along with others. In most families, these behaviors result in some kind of negative consequences for the child. Over time, the child begins to understand that hurting others is not the way to solve problems or settle differences. Even more importantly, the child learns positive ways to get his or her needs met. These are the skills a child must have in order to find success in adolescence and adulthood.

But what happens when a child displays a pattern of hurtful, destructive behavior? Can most parents identify such activity as the start of a problem that, if left unchecked, could lead to more serious negative behavior? Can most parents distinguish between the normal growing-up behaviors mentioned earlier and behaviors that could be signaling the onset of aggression in a child?

Aggression among youth is a growing problem in our society. At its lowest level, it can include behaviors like not following instructions, whining, crying, and teasing. At its most extreme, it can involve

assault, rape, robbery, and murder.

How do children move from child-like innocence to single-minded aggression? And how can these children “unlearn” the aggressive behaviors they have come to depend on? There are no easy answers to these questions, which makes the task of figuring out how to deal with aggression even more difficult.

As a parent, you are responsible for helping your children choose the right path as they grow in society. That path can sometimes be rocky, with challenges and obstacles that must be overcome. That’s where Boys Town can help. This book has two goals: 1) to help parents recognize aggressive behavior in their children and act before it becomes a problem, and 2) to show parents how they can teach their children to stop using negative aggressive behaviors and learn new positive behaviors.

Aggression is a complex issue. Like any behavior problem, it must be identified as a problem before the process of change can begin. This is not always easy. The common thinking is that children use aggression only when they are angry; the image most parents have of an aggressive child is one who physically lashes out at others when he or she is mad. But while anger frequently is involved, kids can turn to aggression for other reasons. Some aggressive kids are motivated by factors like jealousy, spite, or the need for control, and actually plan out their attacks on others. Others use subtle aggressive behaviors

that adults who don't know what to look for might miss or ignore. Still other kids – especially bullies – pick on or torment others for fun or “kicks.”

When it comes to treating or dealing with aggression, every child is different, and what works with one boy or girl might not work with another. There are no magic “cures.” That doesn't mean there isn't hope. In its more than 80 years of working with troubled children, Boys Town has developed proven, effective treatment strategies that have helped youth with many kinds of behavior and emotional problems, including aggression. Combined with a parent's love, these strategies can reduce aggressive behaviors and teach children that success is achieved through treating others with respect, kindness, and compassion.

Parents are the architects of their children's future. Whether you want to prevent problems with aggression or are looking for a way to stop your child's aggressive behavior, we hope this book can be a useful, informative, and insightful blueprint for success.