Roots and Consequences of Violence

How can children become aggressive?

Aggressive behavior, as any other behavior, is the result of a combination of individual factors and factors in the family, community and society.

Individual factors

Temperament, biological genes, birth complications, attention deficit, exposure to mother’s drug use.

Family factors

Lack of parental supervision; being abused by parents; depressed parents; domestic violence; parenting style; access to arms; too many violent TV shows and video games.

Community factors

Belonging to a gang; drug trade in the neighborhood; isolation; access to arms; violence in the neighborhood; poor housing.

Societal Factors

Violence in the media; access to weapons; discrimination; poverty.

*Major consequences of violence in the lives of young children include:*

1. Violence becomes a way to resolve problems.
2. More frequent acting out.
3. World is seen as a dangerous and scary place.
4. Loss of trust in people.
5. Difficulty in concentrating and doing poorly in school.

*Do you know that:*

1. Children learn by observing and imitating people around them and from their experiences?
2. Violence can be physical, emotional, sexual; and neglect is also a form of violence?
3. Children can be involved with violence as victims, aggressors or witnesses?
4. There are two forms of violence?   
     
   **Instrumental aggression:**   
   When children cause harm to someone to get something they want.

**Relational aggression:**   
When they hurt someone to get revenge or to dominate.

What Makes Children Angry

Babies (0 to 18 months)

Are angry when they have a discomfort caused by hunger, loud noises or tiredness.

They show it by crying.

Toddlers (18 to 36 months)

Can be easily angered because:

(a) they think they are the center of the world and can be frustrated when they cannot do or have what they want.   
(b) it is difficult to share things.   
(c) they have a strong notion of what belongs to them.   
(d) they still don't know many words, can't speak well, and can be upset and angry because people don't understand them.   
(e) have difficulty controlling their feelings.

They show anger with tantrums.

Preschoolers (3 to 5 years)

Are angry because they cannot yet control their emotions; are not yet good at using words when they are frustrated and angry; are learning how to share; have a hard time understanding that other people have different ideas.

They show anger with tantrums and aggression.

Children aged 6 to 8 years

Can be angry when they feel something is not fair; when they are rejected, punished, discriminated against or misunderstood.

They show anger by hurting and bullying others and using words to cause harm.

What Makes Teenagers Angry

1. Teens get angry when they feel misunderstood by their parents.
2. If they are deeply upset about something that they are keeping to themselves they may act angry rather than distressed. It’s just easier for them.
3. Depressed kids often present as angry — particularly males. It is not uncommon for depressed male teens to act out when feeling sad. Keep an eye out for this especially if it is anger that lasts for several days and if it is a change in behavior.
4. Try very hard not to hold a grudge or practice the silent treatment. This not only makes the teens mad but also breaks their sensitive little hearts.Also, keep in mind that you are their most important role model so you don’t want to role model this sort of behavior.
5. They get mad when they feel that their moms and dads are clueless, that is, when you don’t really understand what goes on in their lives and you make the dreadful error of thinking that you do. Shame on you for being so presumptuous is what they are thinking in their teen brains.
6. Try to read their non-verbal cues particularly when they are ready to end a conversation. They may not always tell you when they are conversationed-out but their body language may speak volumes. Pay attention so that the conversation ends on a good note rather than on an irritated note.

What to Do When You Are Angry

1. Think before acting.   
2. Calm down.   
3. Use the RETHINK Steps:

Recognize what makes you angry.

Empathize with the other person’s feelings.

Think of positive things about the situation.

Hear what the other person is saying to you.

Include “I” messages to tell how you feel.

Notice what happens to your body.

Keep your attention on the present situation.

Teaching by Example

Children learn by imitating and watching people. Be a positive model.

**How?**

1. Learn to manage your own stress and to control your anger.
2. Talk to others about your feelings and ideas in a respectful way.
3. Solve your problems and disputes using words, not violence.
4. Later involvement in serious violence.
5. Health problems as adults.
6. Talk to yourself aloud about a problem and a solution.

Show by Your Example

Think out loud and say something like "I am not watching this program; it is too violent," or "I don't like to watch people hurting each other even when it is pretend," then change the channel to a nonviolent program.

* Don't watch inappropriate violent TV shows when your children are present.
* Schedule limited TV viewing hours for yourself.
* Don’t keep the TV on all the time.

Play/read books, draw, do puzzles, sing or listen to music with your children to show that there are fun alternatives to TV and video games.

Turn off the TV when violence in a program becomes apparent; have your children do other things with you that they would enjoy.