

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES
RESPONDING TO
AGGRESSIVE
BEHAVIOR

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RESPONDING TO AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

In dealing with a student who is acting aggressively toward classmates, you want to send a strong message that aggressive behavior will not be tolerated in your classroom. In addition, you want to help him develop more appropriate ways of settling disputes with peers. Make sure, however, to avoid harsh punishment or humiliation. Disciplining him severely may only fuel his anger and make him more determined to continue his aggressive behavior.

RESPONDING TO AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

What Can You Do?

1. Be assertive in breaking up a fight. If two elementary school students are engaged in a fight, use a strong loud voice to stop it. If that does not work, you might want to say something odd to divert their attention (for example, “Look up. The ceiling is falling.”). If they do not stop and you cannot separate them, have a student go to the office to request help. If a crowd of children is gathering, insist that they move away or sit down, perhaps clapping your hands to get their attention. After the incident, meet with the students together so they can give you their versions of what happened and you can resolve any lingering problems. Also notify the parents.

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What Can You Do?

2. Respond calmly but firmly to the student. Speak in a firm, no-nonsense manner to stop a student's aggressive behavior, using physical restraint as a last resort. In responding to him, pay attention to your verbal as well as non-verbal language. Even if he is yelling at you, stay calm. Allow him to say what he is upset about without interrupting him and then acknowledge his feelings. Avoid crossing your arms, pointing your finger or making threats, all of which may intensify his anger and stiffen his resistance.

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3. Consider giving the student a time out. You may conclude that his aggressive behavior warrants separating him from the rest of the class, either to protect your students or to send him a strong message that what he did merited a serious consequence. You can do this by giving him a time out in class or sending him to the office. In the time-out area, have him sit in a chair and instruct him to remain quiet. Let him know that he can return to the class activity after a set number of minutes. If he leaves the chair or acts in a disruptive manner, reset the timer to zero.

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4. After the child cools down, talk with him privately. While he may expect you to react punitively, surprise him by reacting supportively. Express your confidence that he can resolve problems without being hurtful to his peers. Tell him that you think he must be upset about something to lose control as he did and you want to understand what may be bothering him. If he does open up to you, listen attentively without interrupting him. Speaking in a calm voice, tell him that you understand why he was upset but stress that he has to find a way to express his anger with words rather than with his hands.

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What Can You Do?

5. Have the student apologize. While you do not want to force him to say he is sorry because this may only fuel his anger, you want to strongly encourage him to make amends with the student he hit. If he is willing to do this, it will help soothe hurt feelings and avoid future conflicts.

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What Can You Do?

6. Require students involved in a conflict to fill out a behavior form. After they have calmed down, have them complete a form that asks them to describe what triggered the conflict, how they behaved, and how they could have handled the situation differently. Meet with each student to discuss their responses. This form provides a record of the incident that you can use when meeting with their parents and also helps them learn to reflect on and modify their behavior.

- Adapted from:

Shore, K. (2020, September 17). *Responding to Aggressive Students*. Ken Shore.

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