

Suggestions of workshops preventing aggressive behaviour

Introduction

The ability to deal with difficult situations requires of people who conduct classes with children, teenagers or adults the skill to solve various types of events. Having knowledge based on theory of how aggressive behaviour is created, is the first step to solve these problems.

There are three basic theories of the source of aggression to be found in literature:

1) theory of instincts – aggression is an inborn instinct and a person, by nature, behaves aggressively and is violent;

2) theory of frustration – according to which the cause of aggressive behaviour is the ongoing frustration that is the result of unfulfilled needs;

3) theory of social learning – people learn aggressive behaviour through their own experiences or copying.¹

Aggression may take on a physical or verbal form. In the verbal form, such examples can be found:

– attacking the person's character, e.g. „you're behaving like a wild animal!";

– attacking competences, e.g. „you dumb ass", „you suck-up", „you plodder";

– attacking the origin, e.g. „you're a redneck", „you're acting as if you were born in a pigsty";

– attacking appearance, e.g. „you always look like a dustman", „dressed bimbo";

– defamatory comparison, e.g. „you'll never be anything!", „you break everything you touch!";

¹ J. Ranschburg, *Lęk, gniew, agresja*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1993.

- non-verbal symbols, e.g. making silly faces or gestures symbolising offensive vocabulary;
- threatening, e.g. with literature figures or film characters;
- teasing and acrimonious remarks, e.g. "you look like a monkey", "sissy", "go tell daddy";
- insulting and swearing, e.g. "your mother is stupid", vulgar words;
- laughing at and threatening, e.g. "look what's she's wearing today!", "come to school tomorrow and you'll get hurt!";
- calling names, e.g. "hey, you, four-eyed", "you trollpop".

We can talk about physical aggression when there is:

- instrumental aggression, when the abuser wants to achieve some goal;

- emotional aggression, when a victim is scared or angry.²

Examples of physical aggression can be such types of behaviour as:

- fights between students;
- hitting, kicking, poking, dubbing legs, jerking;
- shaking, strangling, sitting on the opponent;
- slapping, spanking;
- attacking teachers – throwing objects, putting bins over the head;
- sexual harassment;
- stubbing;
- touching with a hot object, burning with a match or a cigarette;
- feeding or watering by force;
- closing in a dark or small rooms, e.g. in a wardrobe or a cellar;
- putting on different pieces of clothing to mock a person, etc.

Reasons of aggressive behaviour that may, in time, turn into violence, we see in various phenomena, including the following

- aggression and domestic violence, both among children and between children and parents;
- inappropriately realised maternal and paternal roles;
- negative or reserved approach of parents towards children from a very early age;
- lack of specified norms of behaviour towards parents and siblings, mutual disregard and insulting each other;
- underdeveloped self-control of behaviour;
- using alcohol and drugs by parents and often by children, observing domestic reverts;
- showing violence on TV, in films and computer games;

² Ibidem.

- using vulgar language on a daily basis, accepting vulgar language in the newspapers, radio, TV or literature;
- frustration resulting from no good contacts with adults;
- low self-esteem combined with a great number of negative statements from adults and peers;
- not following the rules of school life, frequent lack of reaction from the teachers (it-is-better-not-to-interfere attitude);
- inability to react to conflicts and inability to solve them;
- frustration resulting from no life perspectives, no idea on how to spend free time, etc.

Safety in contacts with parents, siblings, teachers or other adults results in a lower number of tension and conflicts. A child surrounded by love and interest has fewer reasons to use aggression and hostility. They only reach for these elements when they are afraid, experience loneliness, have many dilemmas or when they have a strong need of acceptance or crave attention.

The best way of preparing oneself to deal with the phenomenon of aggression and violence may be workshops for children at different age, teachers working on different levels of education in educational facilities, but also for parents. When talking about educational facilities, we think of schools, caring-educational facilities, children centres, juvenile delinquency facilities, emergency care centres, etc. On the other hand, working with children and youth may include using lesson plans and PE lessons during which we will teach how to behave in situations connected with aggressive behaviour, or how to - using movement - release aggressive behaviour.

The aim of the presented solutions is an attempt to present suggestions of different classes for teachers and students, which would make it easier to prevent aggressive behaviour. Lesson plans and lessons presented below are designed for people working with children and youth causing educational problems, but also as form of activities preventing aggression.

An excellent way of solving events connected with aggressive behaviour is play. Appropriate selection of games will allow to release the tension and may prevent negative reactions. Games may be divided into the following groups:

1) seeing aggressive feelings and expressing them ("Gallery of feelings", "A cube of emotions", "When I'm furious, I...", "Wild fury - animals", "Pass on a funny face", "A journey to the land of fury");

2) recognising the reasons of fury and aggression ("The hole in the wall", "Conquering a castle", "A sack full of fury", "This is mine");

3) getting to know oneself and others ("Oracle", "Think of a child", "Four corners", "Mirror");

4) controlling and overcoming anger ("Cards of anger", "Wrong number", "Thumb duel", "Fencing teaspoons", "Back to back", "Western duel", "Balloon battle", "Furious people");

5) building up the sense of self-esteem ("A child in the well", "A street of friendship", "The same and yet different", "I'm proud of...");

6) beginning non-aggressive contacts ("Building things using bodies", "Co-operation - sticks", "Transport on the back", "Group picture", "Gordian knot", "Windows", "Paper planes fight with fury", "We are a community").³

Suggestions of classes are below.

EDUCATIONAL LESSON: HOW TO DEAL WITH AGGRESSION?

Group: pupils from fifth and sixth grade of primary school.

General aims:

- 1) what is prevention of aggressive behaviour?
- 2) what is the crux of aggressive behaviour?, their reasons and specificity;
- 3) how to deal with emotions?
- 4) how to build up trust?, openness in a group or integrating a class.

Operational aims: after the class, a student can explain what aggressive behaviour is, what is their nature and basis; he understands the term of difficult emotions, e.g. anger, sadness, wrath; he knows what can lead to aggressive behaviour; he can suggest examples of constructive ways of releasing emotional tension.

Methods and forms of work: a lecture, drama, work in little groups, individual tasks.

Teaching aids: big sheets of paper, markers, A4 pieces of paper in different colours.

Place: school classroom.

Course of a class: theoretical introduction, games and plays, discussion.

³ Examples of games come from: R. Portman, *Gry i zabawy przeciwko agresji*, Kielce: Jedność, 2003; G. Haug-Schnabel, *Agresja w przedszkolu*, Kielce: Jedność, 2003; H. Baum, *Pokonywać słabości*, Kielce: Jedność, 2002; K. Vopel, *Zabawy, które łączą*, part 1, Kielce: Jedność, 2001.

What is aggression and violence?

A teacher explains the notion of anger (emotional state), aggression (according to Waldemar Bańka, it is "directed activity aimed at causing a psychological or physical damage [...]. Only such behaviour may be understood as aggressive that is provoked by the intention of causing pain or suffering"⁴) and violence (using one's advantage over another person).

Students are divided into three groups, they are given strips of paper where there are different situations presented. Their job is to put them into categories of aggressive, violence and other – each group is stuck to a sheet of paper of different colour. Later they have to justify their choice.

Examples of events:

Johhny was throwing stones into a huge pond and splashed mud over other children.

Sophie spat on Kate's coat.

Frank punched Kris in the face.

Eve was pushing in the cloakroom and stepped on a friend's foot.

Mike got a F in a test and tore his notebook in fury.

Albert kicked the door with all his power and made a hole in them.

Mum killed a duck and made it for dinner.

Football fans, after a lost match of their team, smashed rubbish bins.

Grandfather killed a mosquito that bit his hand.

Ann shouted when she hit her finger.

Peter kicked Andrew in his ankle when they were playing football.

Tony cut out some signs on the bench.

Joan took out Chris' diary and started reading it out loud.

The doctor held the patient who needed injection despite him wrenching.

After the training, Dagmara threw Barbra on the mat.

Zibi accidentally ran into Paul while skating.

A game „Launching a space rocket”

This game can help us overcome tension. It starts with children tapping their fingers on the table, first slowly and quietly, then faster and louder; they hit the tables with their hands or clap, also with increasing volume and tempo; they stamp their feet also quiet at the start and then louder; they copy insects buzzing until they yell. The noise and speed increase gradually, children stand up rapidly, throw their arms in the air and the racket is launched. Slowly, children sit down again, their movements calm down. The noise goes away, there is now only quiet buzzing of insects that also slowly dies away until the rocket disappears behind the clouds.

⁴ W. Bańka, *Wybrane zagadnienia z psychologii społecznej*, Płock: Novum, 1999, p. 79.

A game „Animals - guess who”

Each student draws an animal on a piece of paper, which symbolises his character features. A change in group structure – students sit in a circle. The sheets of paper are placed inside the circle, clean side face up. Every student draws one piece of paper and, by looking at the drawing, writes down three features he associates with this animal. Again, the papers come back to the middle of the room and there is a draw. This time, people who draw try to guess who the owner of the picture is. The author comments the features listed under the picture: whether in his opinion, they fit or not, was he thinking about them while making a drawing. Discussing the works of all the children.

How is the aggressor doing, how is the victim feeling?

The groups are to role play the scenes they drew:

Scene 1: Sophie came to school with a new school bag. Her friends snatch it from her and throw to each other, then they kick it on the floor. Sophie tries to take it back, but she can't. Kids laugh.

Scene 2: Mark took his dog for a walk. He met his friends from another class. They took the leash from him and begin to torture the animal – they pull his tail, ears, try to push it into a puddle. Mark cries with anger and fear for his pet.

Scene 3: Kate and Jack come back from school together. Older boys cross their way and demand their cell phones and money. They push them round and threaten to beat them. When it doesn't help, they use force to take the things from them.

The observers of the scenes try to write down the aggressors' feelings and their victims' feelings.

Summary of the lesson

Teacher lists character features on the board, which characterise aggressive behaviour. They are dictated by the students. He also lists the ways of standing up to such situations. Students are to observe different people in their closest environment and determine which if the events could qualify into aggressive behaviour.

**WORKSHOPS FOR TEACHERS: WE LEARN TO SOLVE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS
CONNECTED WITH VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR**

Group: teachers of various subjects.

Aim of workshop: showing teachers ways of dealing with violence and aggression among youth, showing them how to help young people fight violence and aggression.

Methods and forms of work: lecture, unfinished sentences, work in small groups, individual tasks.

Teaching aids: newspapers, balloons, a sack, a pencil, a brick, a ball, a note book, clay, a mug, a mirror, some sheets of paper, felt-tip pens.

Place: a gym or some other carpeted place where we can move.

Course of a class: theoretical introduction, games and plays, discussion.

Theoretical introduction: what is violence and what are its types, how to avoid violence, mocking people is also violence, cyber-bullying, hating people (showing hatred, offending, criticising in the internet or using a mobile phone).⁵

Integrating game „My name”

The participants sit in a circle, everyone says their name and thinks of an adjective beginning with the same letter. Next person repeats the names of people before her and adds their own, e.g. Mark malicious, Geoffrey gorgeous, etc.

A game „I’m angry because...”

Everyone writes down the letters of their names one under the other and adds one activity that makes them angry, which begins with that letter, e.g.:

- J** jeans which are torn
- A** aggressive driver
- C** constant reprimanding
- K** kippers for lunch

We choose these that are most frequent and try to find solutions to these situations in groups.⁶

A game „Stepping on someone’s toes”

The participants get into pairs and hold hands. There is a page from a newspaper between them „toes”. Every participant tries to pull their partner to his side so that he has to step on this “toe”.⁷

A game „Back to back”

The participants stand to two rows and hold up their hands. Both rows turn their backs on each other and try to push the other side away. The rows cannot break.⁸

⁵ M. Janczura, *Agresja i przemoc. Niezbędnik nauczyciela, pedagoga, dyrektora*, Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Producentów i Dziennikarzy Radiowych, 2014.

⁶ R. Portman, *Gry i zabawy...*

⁷ K. Vopel, *Zabawy, które łączą...*

⁸ H. Baum, *Pokonywać słabości...*

A game „A sack full of fury”

The leader holds a sack where there are little things, e.g. a pencil, paper, a brick, a ball, a note book, a stick, clay, etc. Every participant takes out one thing that he associates with anger or inappropriate behaviour, and has to answer one question: why did he choose this object? Other participants also list names of other objects that are not in the sack but are associated with anger.⁹

Working in small groups - solving a problem

The leader tells a story of a boy and nails:

There was once a boy of very bad character. His father gave him a little bag of nails and asked to nail them into a fence each time he loses his patience and has an argument with someone.

On the first day, the boy nailed 37 nails. In the weeks to come, he learnt to control himself and the number of nails grew less and less. He discovered it is easier to control himself than to nail the nails.

Then a day came when the boy used no nails at all. So, he came to his father and told him about it. Then, his father asked him to pull out one nail each day he does not lose his patience and will have no argument with anyone.

Days passed and finally the boy could tell his father he'd pulled out all the nails out. The father took him to the fence and said: "Son, you did very well, but look at how many holes there are in the fence. This fence will never be the same as before. When you argue with someone and tell them terrible things, you leave a scar behind, just like in this fence. You can stab a man and take the knife out, but the wound will remain. It doesn't matter how many times you'll apologise. Words hurt as much as knives do."¹⁰

A task to solve in groups: what could the boy have done to nail the nails? How can you try to fix the holes? – we chose the most accurate solutions.

Class summary

We list three events that get on our nerves. We establish the difference between aggression and violence. We find ways of dealing with these phenomena.

**WORKSHOP FOR PARENTS: HOW TO DEAL WITH AGGRESSION
AND VIOLENCE?**

Group: parents of children from a given class.

Aim of workshop: familiarising parents with the mechanisms of aggression and violence; paying attention to how relationships in

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ G. Haug-Schnabel, *Agresja w przedszkolu...*

the family influence the aggressive behaviour; presenting a psychological portrait of a victim and abuser; familiarising parents with how adults react in situations of anger, aggression and violence.

Methods and forms of work: lecture, workshop, practical exercises, brainstorming, discussion.

Teaching aids: jigsaw puzzle with definitions, paper, felt-tip pens, a balloon, a towel per pair of participants, a board with features of a victim and abuser.

Place: a gym or other carpeted room where we could move around.

Course of a class: theoretical introduction, games and plays, discussion.

Theoretical introduction: what is aggression and violence? What dangers are there that go with aggressive behaviour? How to talk to children about these dangers?

Jigsaw puzzle

Participants are divided into three groups. The leader hands out one set of jigsaw puzzle each. Their job is to put together the pieces where there are definitions of aggression, violence and mobbing. Then the participants read the definitions again and to the others.

Definition of aggression by Jeno Ranschburg: "aggression is any intended action – open or symbolic – that is aimed at hurting someone or something, or causing them pain."¹¹

Definition of violence: "any not accidental acts violating personal freedom of an individual, which contribute to physical or psychological damage of another person and which exceed any social norms of interpersonal contact."¹²

Definition of mobbing: "creating an air of danger around a person, which is aimed at excluding this person from social life."¹³

In groups, we determine the features of anger and establish ways of conduct for adults towards an angry child.

Drama

Each team gets to prepare a scene where children react to parents' decision. Later, we exchange ideas on what to do when a child is angry:

- listen to the child (if he wants to);
- do not judge or comment;

¹¹ I. Pospiszyl, *Razem przeciw przemocy*, Warsaw: Żak, 1999, p. 53.

¹² Ibidem, p. 16.

¹³ D. Olweus, *Mobbing – fala przemocy w szkole. Jak ją powstrzymać?*, Warsaw: Jacek Santorski & Co., 1998, p. 16–17.

- do not try to solve the problem;
- try to understand: "I understand you, but anger doesn't solve the problem..."
- talk to a child.

Games as an example of releasing anger:

„Thumb duel“

A pair of participants stands or sits facing each other. They stretch their right arms and engage with their fingers – only a thumb may move freely. The winner is the one who covers the other person's thumb.

„A jumping balloon“

A pair faces each other and every participant holds one corner of a towel. On it, there is an inflated balloon. We bounce it using the towel and try to make as many bounces as possible, so that the balloon doesn't touch the ground. The slower we move, the more harmonious the exercise becomes.

Brainstorming on the portrait of a victim and abuser

Presenting a psychological portrait of a victim and abuser, where the common aspect is not dealing with emotions. On big sheets of paper, we list the features of both.

Victim:

- little children cry when attacked, big children withdraw;
- loneliness, lack of friends;
- distorted sense of safety;
- person is very careful, shy, often physically weak;
- he thinks he's „useless“ and eventually withdraws;
- lack of acceptance in other children; often mocked and pushed around;
- he is unhappy;
- he tries to befriend the abuser;
- he avoids peers, chooses the company of adults; never voices his opinion;
- tries to avoid the abuser, doesn't go to school, pretends to be ill;
- has all the signs of aggression, e.g. bruises or scratches.

Aggressor:

- is stressed, does not control his behaviour (he suffers, so he hurts others);
- is agitated, nervous, not sure of himself or too sure of himself;
- low self-esteem;

- raised in a family with problems (e.g. alcohol, violence, single parent);
- can have material or psychological profits from violence;
- is respected and easily establishes relationships;
- he bullies, mocks, hits, pushes, kicks;
- has a strong need to dominate, subordinates others using threats;
- gets angry easily and loses temper;
- can't handle difficult situations;
- doesn't accept the rules and creates his own;
- doesn't accept any suggestion - negates everything;
- pleased with himself, doesn't feel guilty or ashamed;
- often pretends to be someone else, lies;
- shows behaviour that is socially not acceptable (stealing, smoking, drinking, drug abuse).

Parents suggest forms of conduct in aggressive situation, support them with examples from their own experience, justify their choices. The leader draws attention to some aspects (if they are not included):

- a grown-up cannot become "prosecutor", he should not accuse or blame because it provokes bad emotions and releases a chain of aggressive reactions;
- you should become a mediator who helps solve problems that cause aggression;
- a tone of voice for mediations (calm, quiet, never raising your voice).

Finally, we try to list the features that characterise a mediator (e.g. he splits the sides, using a calm and long conversation, he helps solve problems, justifies his interference, does not give a lecture, makes it possible for children to evaluate a situation, encourages to talk about emotions in a given conflict situation).

Calming game - "We play with our feet"

The leader says:

I'd like to suggest a game to you during which you will only be able to communicate in a special way. First, everyone should find a partner who interests you and you'd like to get to know him. Sit opposite this person and take your shoes off... Look at each other and... say nothing.

When I give you a sign, I'd like you to move your feet. Pull them closely to you and then start moving slowly towards feet of your partner as if your feet were two wanderers who meet in the open space (30 seconds).

Pull your feet to you again... Imagine your feet would like to have an argument. Let them fight. Press your feet against your partner's and wrestle (30 seconds).

Again, pull your feet to you... Imagine, your feet are terribly curious, but also a little bit afraid. Again, move your feet towards your partner's, let them get to know each other, like children (30 seconds).

Again, pull your feet to you and imagine it is winter now. Your feet are frozen. Touch each other with your feet and start warming them up by moving them... (30 seconds).

Split your feet. Move them the way you want to or you think your partner would like them to be moved (30 seconds).

Now, say „Good-bye” with your feet. Say „Good-bye” to your partner's feet (15 seconds).

During this game the participants make a special contact with each other. At the same time they practise non-verbal communication. This game helps us become aware that feet give us the possibility to not only move by also to “hold our head up high”. The way we use them proves how much down to earth we are.¹⁴

Final reflections

The solutions suggested above both for children and adults are just a signal how they can be organised. It is worth remembering that the most important skill is the one of observation. Any type of behaviour that worries parents or teachers should be analysed. This can be the beginning of a conflict and no signal can be trivialised. A conversation with a child cannot be limited to asking about homework or grades. Changes in behaviour or appearance of our children also should not be left without being analysed – sometimes it will be these signals that will tell us something is going on. Let's also try to look at the way of communication applying the idea of Janusz Korczak: “Kids are no dumber than adults, they are just less experienced.”¹⁵

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¹⁴ K. Vopel, *Gry i zabawy interakcyjne dla dzieci i młodzieży*, part 1, Kielce: Jedność, 1999.

¹⁵ J. Korczak, *Król Maciuś na wyspie bezludnej*, Cieszyn: Puls, 1996, p. 172.

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