



Our Parenting Style could be a Predictor of Physical Aggression in our Kids

We tend not to think that little kids can be overly aggressive, but according to research, physical aggression is most prevalent during early childhood. Aggression typically increases rapidly from the first year of life to the end of the third year and then declines, and the continuation of aggression beyond the third year is a strong predictor of later antisocial behaviour.

A team of US researchers has examined the link between parenting style and its' possible impact on aggressive behaviour in preschoolers. The study was comprised of 92 families, who had

a child around four years of age. Researchers examined whether intervention-induced changes in harsh (authoritarian/critical), responsive (nurturing, meeting needs), and stimulating (cohesive/sensitive) parenting brought about the prevention of physical aggression in high-risk children. The children were studied at home and in a formal setting as regards physical aggression towards a parent and their potential to destroy or damage objects.

Several parent training programs have been shown to enhance parenting practices and reduce or prevent conduct problems in young children. The current study showed that changes in parenting practices account for a significant portion of intervention effects on physical aggression during early childhood.

KEY FINDINGS

- A strong, positive parent/child relationship is a necessary first step or foundation for the application of disciplinary strategies for misbehaviour.
- A strong relationship exists between changes in harsh parenting and changes in child physical aggression.
- A link between improvements in parental praise, affection and responsiveness during parent-child play interactions lead to improved levels of child physical aggression directed at a parent or object during similar interactions.
- Changes and improvements in parenting practices leads to significant reduction in physical aggression during early childhood.
- Anger management and developing a greater understanding of the detrimental role of harsh criticism benefit parents who display a harsh parenting style.
- Parenting behaviours that help to reduce risk for conduct problems in pre-schoolers include stimulating a child's thinking activities and involvement in school readiness activities at home.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ✓ Reflect on your parenting style and be honest about whether changes are needed.
- ✓ If your child is acting out, try to get to the root cause of the behaviour. This may include talking things over with a partner, family, or health professional.
- ✓ Check with your GP that there's no physical reason for misbehaviour. This may include anything from poor hearing or a developmental delay to ASD or a sensory processing disorder.
- ✓ If anger management is a problem for you or your partner, seek professional advice. Everyone will benefit.

- ✓ Ensure discipline and consequences for inappropriate behaviour are consistently applied.
- ✓ Spend time on one-to-one communication to encourage, inspire, challenge and communicate with your child.
- ✓ Parent from the heart – not the head or how someone else thinks you should be raising your child.
- ✓ Make sure you make time for you. Nurture yourself as you would your child. Time alone on the iPad, coffee with a friend, dinner with your partner. Where possible try to share responsibilities for care with other members of the family.

Source: Brotman, et al., *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 50:3 (2009), pp 235-245.

TAKEAWAY

FROM PROFESSOR MICHAEL BERNARD
FOUNDER, YOU CAN DO IT! EDUCATION

A parenting style that is harsh, authoritarian, critical and intolerant, does little to build a young child's confidence or self esteem. This kind of role modelling only reinforces for a child that an aggressive, confronting attitude may win the day, but doesn't reinforce feelings of wellbeing, contentment or happiness. Responsive, authoritative parenting stimulates and encourages, it meets kids half way, and it lays the foundations for discipline when needed.