

From the Counsellor's Desk – November, 2014

Aggression in Children

Hello Parents,

All of us will agree that the level of aggression in children has increased manifold during the last decade or so. Children being children, it is understood and accepted that they will have their little tiffs, arguments and bouts of temper tantrums. However what causes utmost concern is the fact that very insignificant acts and situations can be triggers for major showdowns and temper outbursts. In other words the degree of active and passive aggression and the frequency of expression are quite alarming these days and needs to be dealt with firmly and immediately.

Expression of aggression may vary from violent outbursts to more subtle forms like negativity and irritability. Common patterns include:-

- Hitting, punching, pushing, kicking – sometimes poking pencils and throwing things.
- Abusive language, name calling
- Teasing, gossiping, spreading rumours
- Negativity, disobedience, obstinacy
- Irritability, moodiness
- Socially maligning someone's reputation – at social networking sites

Common reasons for aggressive behavior:-

- The most obvious reason is that children who face violence and aggression at home, school, playground or tuitions, take it out on others who are weaker to them. So if they are verbally or physically abused for the purpose of disciplining or getting things done, then in all likelihood they will use the same tactics to deal with others.
- Often it is not even required that the child be personally abused. Just by being in a volatile environment, where the general decibel level of conversations are high, or where people are rude, outspoken and irreverent of others' dignity and respect, is enough to perpetuate aggression in children.
- Scientific researchers have shown time and again that overexposure to the screen (T.V., computer, mobile, video games), brings about bio chemical changes in the brain, which makes children more prone to aggression. Moreover the content of

most video games and action movies is so full of violence that, children become immune to the sight of blood and violence when they witness it in real life.

- These days children lead such structured lives that there is very little or no time for them for 'free play'. – i.e. to do their own thing, without any agenda or goal in mind. The only idea is to have fun and wind down. This builds up a lot of frustration and consequent aggression in them.
- Coupled with this is the fact that children carry huge loads of academic pressure, peer pressure etc. on their shoulders. The need to excel in studies, sports, extra curriculars, the need to meet parental and peer group expectations, creates a lot of stress in children which leads to anger and aggression in them.
- Sometimes it may be necessary to do a reality check to ensure that the child is not being sexually abused somewhere and in some manner. Often when children are unable to express themselves and share about a traumatic incident with someone, they might give vent to their anguish through violence and aggression.

What we can do, to reduce the level of aggression in our children.

- Walk The Talk – merely shouting, screaming and commanding the child to be polite, courteous and well behaved will not help. We have to introspect and role model the behavior that we want to see in our child. So if we are in the habit of getting angry easily and snapping at people in general or the child in particular, or if there are frequent arguments and heated conversations with other members or staff of the family, then we have to immediately check ourselves.
- Limit the use of screen time. Boundaries need to be set from the very beginning, where the child gets a clear message that maximum one hour will be allowed. Care should also be taken to not club this with meal times. Here again one has to lead by example. If the television is on throughout the day, for different family members, the child is bound to get attracted and engaged.
- Check that the child is not being physically or sexually abused, or bullied by someone.
- Ensure that the child's daily timetable gives him some time to be himself and do what he enjoys most, without any worry to reach a particular level or achieve something at the end of it.

- Converse with the child regularly, where you do most of the listening, so that the child gets an opportunity to vent out whatever is bothering him/her.
- From an early age children need to be taught how to tolerate and handle frustrations and how to deal with conflicts within the self and with others in a peaceful manner.
- Regular physical exercise, yoga, meditation, quiet walks and a certain closeness to natural surroundings, fosters peace in children.

With best wishes from:-

The School Counsellors at La Martiniere, Kolkata

For appointments, interactions and discussions with the school counsellors, kindly contact the following numbers:

La Martiniere for Girls: 033 4040 6663

La Martiniere for Boys: 033 4040 6612 / 033 4040 6629