



HANDLING AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Governmental Services Center
Serving the People Who Serve the People

Aggression is the most extreme form of interpersonal conflict and is clearly unacceptable behavior. It may be defined as “excessively controlling or threatening, being overly competitive, being insulting or intimidating, needing to prove others wrong, winning at others’ expense, or acting spitefully or “vengefully.”

Deflect Aggression

The best strategy, in most cases, is to deflect aggression and extreme emotional content by remaining centered, ignoring insults, avoiding competition, discovering commonalities, and focusing on issues. Remaining calm in the face of aggression usually has a calming effect on the aggressor.

Know and Act on Your Limits

In rare cases, however, the aggressor may view the calmness as a sign of weakness and intensify the attack. In these cases, you must decide how far you’ll allow the aggression and when and how to end it. When you reach the limit of what you can tolerate, use one of several strategies:

- Calmly and firmly tell the aggressor to stop. State that their behavior is inappropriate and unacceptable to you. If the aggressor is willing to listen, suggest alternative behaviors.
- State that you refuse to be treated that way and suggest a later meeting when the aggressor is calmer.

Be aware, however, that aggressors derive satisfaction from causing others to fight or flee. So be cautious about either retaliating or backing down. Generally, the best approach is to remain centered and reasonable. When the aggressor exceeds your personal limits, however, you need to take a stand. If possible, try to deflect the aggression, explore the issues, listen to the aggressor, and acknowledge his or her point of view. Then, if the person is calmer, try to problem solve or negotiate.

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