

Aggressive behaviour towards others can be displayed by children as young as 3 years old . Early years provision can provide a good opportunity to understand and influence how young children play together and communicate.

Bullying behaviour has four key aspects:

IT'S HURTFUL

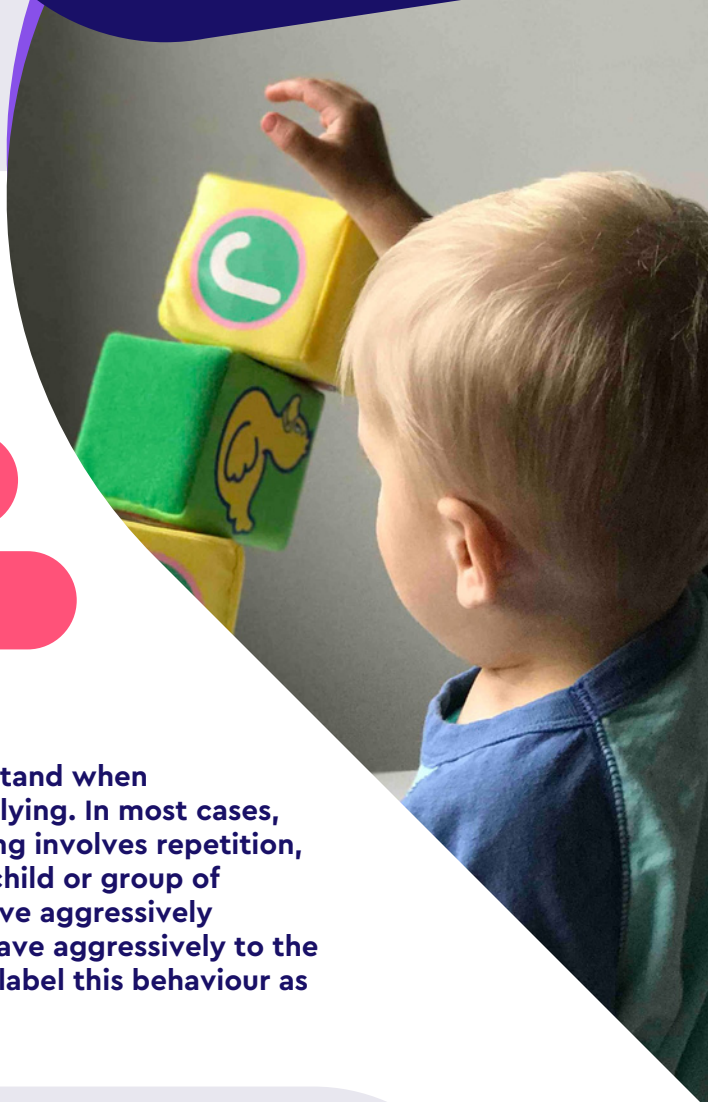
IT'S INTENTIONAL

IT'S REPETITIVE

IT INVOLVES A POWER IMBALANCE

The definition of bullying is very important to understand when assessing the difference between aggression and bullying. In most cases, very young children's behaviour isn't bullying. Bullying involves repetition, with a child being repeatedly picked on by another child or group of children. During early childhood, some children behave aggressively towards others, but they don't often repeatedly behave aggressively to the same children over time, so we would be unlikely to label this behaviour as bullying among this age-group.

However, even if these behaviours aren't necessarily bullying, it is important to acknowledge that this behaviour can be hurtful to others, and it is important to address this. Children have a right to play in a safe and supportive environment. If you're a childminder or nursery practitioner, it's important to know how to tackle these behaviours. Whether a child is behaving aggressively or you just want to prevent it from happening, here are our tips for you.



1- Monks, C. P., & O'Toole, S. Bullying in preschool and infant school. In P. K. Smith & O'Higgins Norman (Eds.) Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Bullying. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Bullying is not a 'rite of passage'. It is well researched that bullying causes long term damage to both the person on the receiving end and those who bully. Challenging aggressive behaviour in the early years gives you a great opportunity to 'nip it in the bud'.
- It is not a child's fault if someone is aggressive towards them. Children should never be told to just ignore it, or to change who they are. It is the children who are behaving aggressively who need to change their behaviour and their attitude.
- Children need to be supported to identify if someone isn't being nice to them and to speak out. They need to feel comfortable to come and tell you.
- Make sure you have behaviour policy and it's up to date, freely accessible and regularly promoted - and that it makes clear how you will respond to aggression as a community. Share it with parents as well.
- Do not label a child a 'bully'. This is an unhelpful label and says that bullying is something you are rather than a behaviour you can change. Instead, talk about aggressive and bullying behaviour.
 - Praise positive behaviour amongst staff and parents.
- Use story telling - there are many books you can use or you could use dolls to act out scenarios to explore empathy and cover sensitive topics with children, for example about children not being good friends or not playing together nicely.
- Challenge stereotypes such as 'these are boys' toys' in a positive and friendly way.
- If you do see instances of aggression or conflict in your setting, think carefully about any ways that you might reduce the chances of this happening again. For example, are there areas that are less supervised than others or times at which these behaviours might be more likely to occur? Or are there ways to empower children to alert you to issues as they arise? Or do you challenge negative language?
- Be clear about how children should behave respectfully towards each other. For example: do you have ground rules such as not being able to say 'you can't play with me/us'?
- Encourage restorative approaches including supporting children to express their feelings in a safe space and apologies to each other in meaningful ways.
- Undertake empathy building activities which help young children learn how to express their feelings and recognise emotions in others, discussing the way that people are different, talking about kindness and helping others to feel better when they are upset.
- Encourage assertiveness in children who might find it difficult to stand up for themselves. For example, you could role-play scenarios or undertake activities that show children how to express their emotions clearly and calmly.
- Work with parent to ensure they understand your approach to bullying and aggression. Are they aware of signs to look out for in case their child might be worried about something? Have a clear route for them to report anything they might be worried about to you. Be clear that it is important to not tell their child to fight back as this may make matters worse.
- Help young children make sense of differences: present positive attitudes and messages about differences amongst us all and the benefits such attitudes bring to all people.



You can complete online CPD training
about bullying for professionals at
[http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/
onlinelearning](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/onlinelearning)