

Aggression in Children & Teens

What is unhealthy aggression for a child or teen?

We all experience anger from time-to-time. Things happen in life that upset us and it's OK to feel those emotions. Just like adults, children feel anger and are still in developmental stages where they're learning what a healthy response to those feelings looks like. Many young children may respond with tantrums or outbursts—but most children outgrow these behaviors between ages seven to nine.

If a child is having tantrums in their adolescent years or beyond, that's a sign of unhealthy or unfinished development. It is very normal for someone to experience anger and irritability during their adolescent and teen years because their hormones, brains and bodies are undergoing many changes. But when this anger becomes extreme and turns into verbal or physical aggression, they may need professional help to learn how to regulate their emotions.

For most children struggling with anger or outbursts, there is often another underlying mental health condition. Genetics, environmental factors, substance use, and childhood trauma are additional elements that may play a role in a child's development and potential for aggressive behavior.



Signs & Symptoms

Below is a list of behaviors that may indicate a child or teen's aggression is unhealthy and potentially jeopardizing their safety or the safety of others.

- Talking, writing or drawing about violence, death, or hurting themselves or someone else
- Frequently getting into verbal or physical fights
- Damaging or vandalizing property
- Using alcohol or drugs
- Talking about or carrying around objects that could be used as a weapon (i.e., firearms, knives, other sharp objects, poisons, etc.)
- Showing aggression by hurting animals, other people, or themselves
- Making verbal threats
- Intense anger and outbursts almost every day
- Displaying risk-taking behaviors (i.e., drinking alcohol or doing drugs, sexually acting out, excessive speeding, etc.)
- Frequently listening to music about violence, playing violent video games, or watching shows or movies with a lot of violence
- Membership in a gang or wanting to become part of one
- Withdrawing from family, friends or activities they once enjoyed
- Poor school performance or attendance
- Issues with relationships with friends and family
- Fixating on something that made them angry for extended periods of time

Our Locations

KANSAS CITY

4300 Brenner Dr.
Kansas City, KS 66104

WICHITA

1507 W. 21st St. N.
Wichita, KS 67203

HAYS

205 E 7th St.
Hays, KS 67601

What You Can Do to Help

If you know a child who is struggling with aggression, here are some ways you can support them:

- **Remain calm and patient in front of them.** Children are often observing how the adults around them react in new, uncertain or stressful situations.
- **Remain clear and consistent when giving directions, rules or other guidance.** Follow through with appropriate consequences when these rules are not followed.
- **Give praise or rewards when rules or directions are well followed.** Children struggling with aggressive behaviors often receive and expect criticism. Look for good behavior to recognize and praise.
- **Ask the child how they would feel if someone was verbally or physically aggressive with them.** If they push a child down on the playground, reframe the situation to make them think about how they would feel if they were pushed down.
- **Encourage the use of coping skills** that will help the child regulate their emotions (i.e., deep breathing, meditation, exercise, listening to music, etc.).
- **Join a training for parents/caregivers to learn skills for managing difficult behaviors in children.**
- **If the child expresses thoughts of self-harm, suicide, or violence against another person, call 911 immediately.** Take these statements very seriously and get them professional help as soon as possible.
- **Speak to their teachers and school counselors** to ensure they know that the child may need additional supervision and support at school.
- **Be observant of their behaviors and help them keep track of when feelings of anger and irritability occur.** Tracking this over time can help identify triggers, what treatment approaches are most effective or any additional concerns.



Contact KVC Hospitals for Support

KVC Hospitals is a network of nonprofit children's psychiatric hospitals and residential treatment centers serving youth ages 6 to 18. Each year, we give thousands of youth a safe place to heal, build resilience, and overcome struggles with behavioral and mental health challenges. Our compassionate team of psychiatric, medical and behavioral health professionals provides a nurturing and therapeutic experience along with a treatment plan tailored to meet each child's individual needs. The goal of our treatment programs is for each child to safely return home with the resources and supports in place to live a healthy and happy life in their community.

If you're concerned that a child in your care is struggling with aggression or other mental health needs, **call KVC Hospitals at 913-890-7468.**

We're available 24/7 to answer your questions.

Here's a list of additional resources you can contact for help:

- Call the child's primary care physician or your local community mental health center
- Text HOME to 741741 for 24/7 support from the Crisis Text Line
- Call the National Alliance on Mental Illness helpline at 800-950-6264, which is staffed by volunteers who have mental health conditions
- Call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255