

**Course Topic: Classroom Management**

**Course Instructor:**

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**Course Synopsis:**

In this session, we introduce different frameworks with which to analyze and understand aggressive student behaviour in the classroom. The frameworks come from a variety of academic fields including intercultural communication, education, counselling and psychology. These frameworks are applied to real life scenarios in order to develop practical classroom management strategies with which to mitigate and/or diffuse the aggression.

**Course Agenda:**

1. Definitions of Aggression
2. Identifying Student Aggression
3. Understanding Possible Factors in Student Aggression
4. Managing and Diffusing Student Aggression
5. Preventing Student Aggression

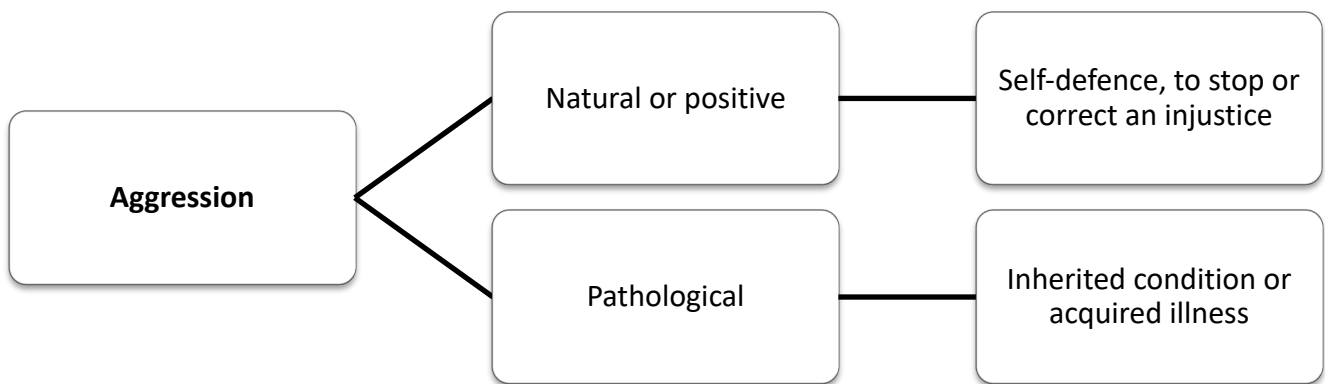
## 1. Definitions of Aggression

**Dictionary Definition:** Aggression is overt or suppressed hostility. It is either innate or results from continued frustration. It can be directed outward against others or inward against oneself.<sup>1</sup>

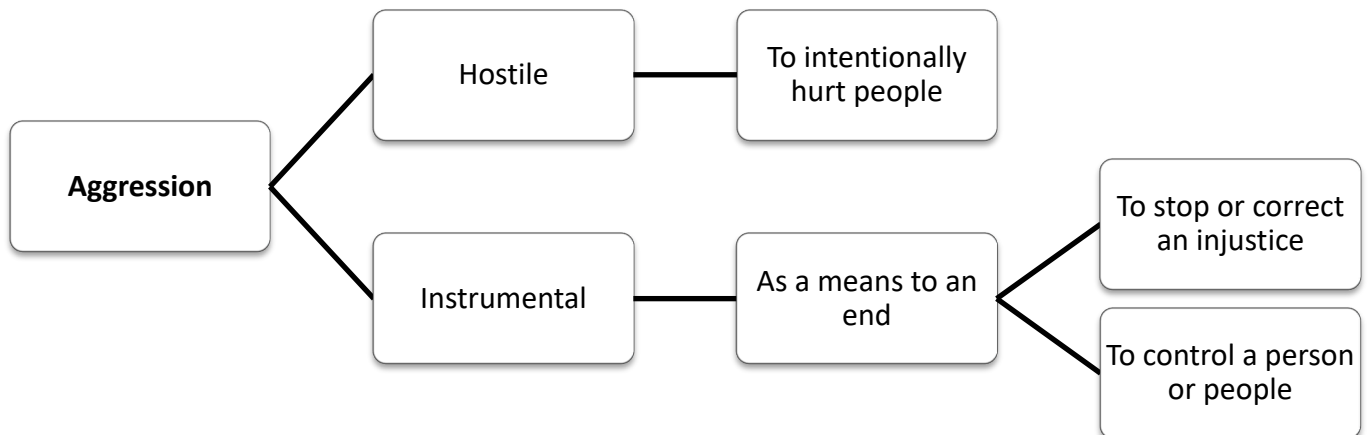
### Aggression versus Violence<sup>2</sup>

**Aggression** is emotional and symbolic. **Violence** involves physical damage to a person, property or location.

### Natural versus Pathological<sup>3</sup>



### Hostile versus Instrumental<sup>4</sup>



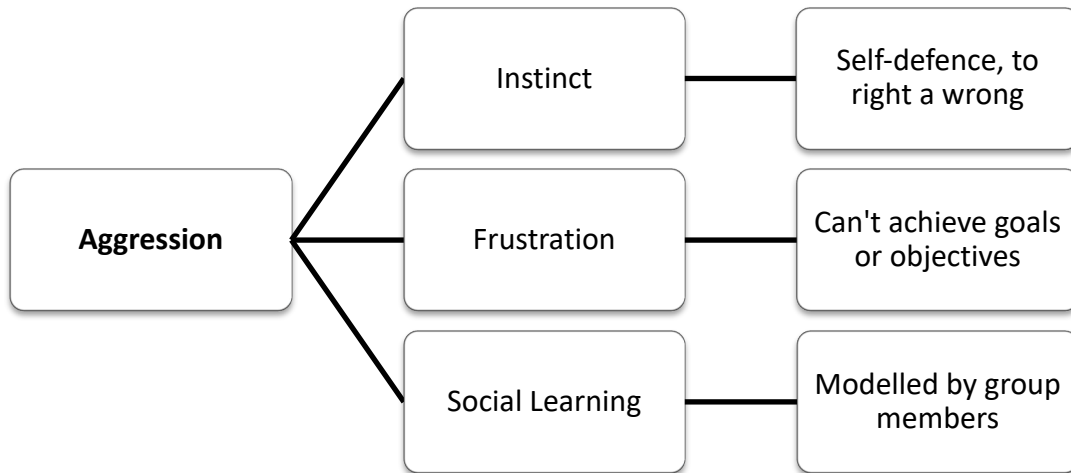
<sup>1</sup> Adapted from [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com).

<sup>2</sup> Moyer (1976)

<sup>3</sup> Maslow (1968)

<sup>4</sup> Buss (1961)

Instinct, Frustration, Social Learning



Components of Aggression<sup>5</sup>

Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Express your feelings and wants as though any other view is unreasonable or stupid. Dismiss, ignore or insult the needs, wants and opinions of others.</li> </ul>
Non-Verbal Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make yourself large and threatening. Eye contact is fixed and penetrating. Voice is loud and perhaps shouting.</li> </ul>
Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your needs are more important and more justified than others'. You have rights and others don't. Your contributions are valuable. Others' are silly, wrong or worthless.</li> </ul>
Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Angry or powerful at the time, and victorious when you win. Afterward—remorse, guilt or self-hatred for hurting others.</li> </ul>
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Win at any expense to others. Gain control over them.</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> Paterson, Randy J., PhD. 2000. The Assertiveness Workbook. New Harbinger Publications.

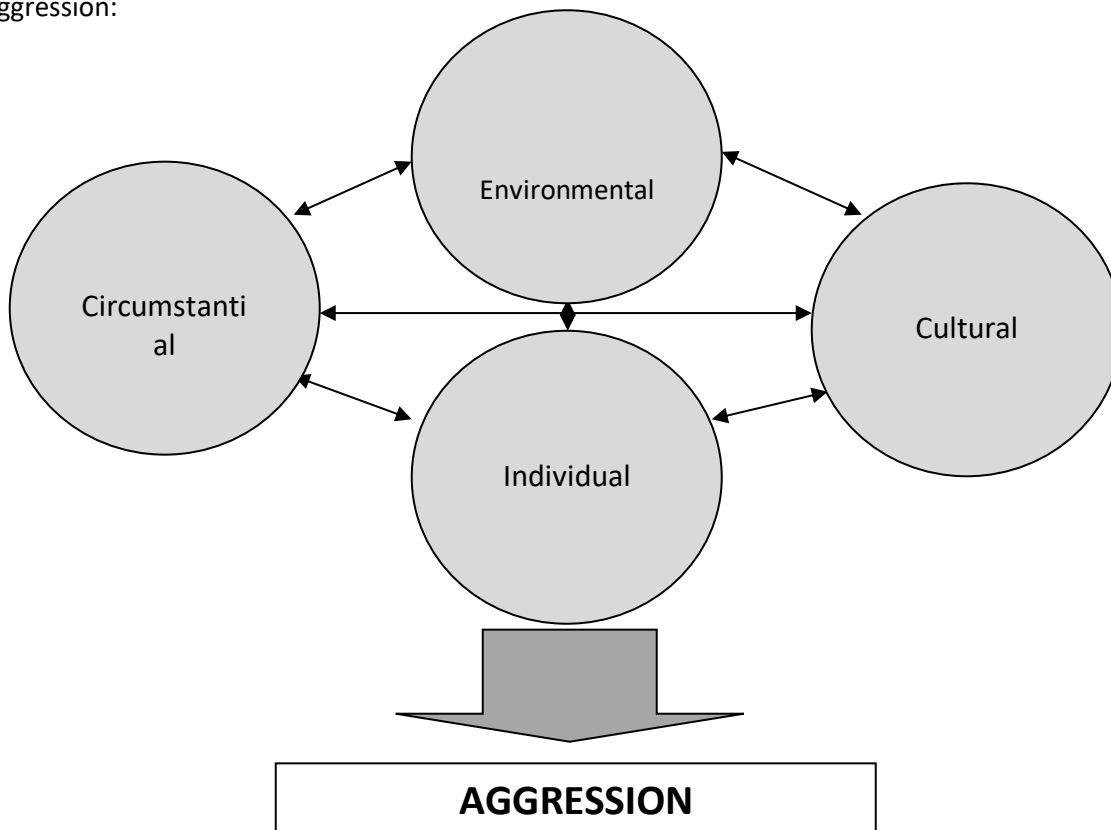
## 2. Identifying Student Aggression

An aggressive student may exhibit some or all of the following:

Verbal (Spoken or Written)	Non-Verbal	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sudden outbursts</li> <li>• Shouting</li> <li>• Swearing</li> <li>• Personal insults</li> <li>• Name calling</li> <li>• Racial or sexual comments</li> <li>• Threats</li> <li>• Sarcasm</li> <li>• Spreading rumours or slander</li> <li>• Verbal harassment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angry facial expression</li> <li>• Staring</li> <li>• Invading personal space</li> <li>• Threatening or violent gestures</li> <li>• Threatening posture</li> <li>• Clenched jaw</li> <li>• Clenched fists</li> <li>• Nervous pacing</li> <li>• Restlessness</li> <li>• Tightly gripping objects</li> <li>• Pushing, shoving, hitting, punching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agitation</li> <li>• Sweating</li> <li>• Red face</li> <li>• Fast heart rate</li> <li>• Emotional abuse</li> <li>• Manipulating friendships</li> <li>• Excluding others from a group</li> <li>• Signs of drug and/or alcohol use.</li> </ul>

## 3. Understanding Possible Factors in Student Aggression

Aggression is not usually the result of any one factor, but rather, is the coming together of a number of factors. These factors can be divided into four main categories, all of which play off one another to generate the aggression:



Circumstantial	Environmental	Cultural	Individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break up of an important relationship</li> <li>• Death of a close family member</li> <li>• Serious illness of a close family member</li> <li>• Financial instability</li> <li>• Recent loss of a job or ongoing lack of employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economically or socially disadvantaged living conditions</li> <li>• Unsafe living conditions (gangs, drug dealing, other criminal activity)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What constitutes aggressive behaviour?</li> <li>• Acceptability of public display of emotion</li> <li>• Status</li> <li>• Power distance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor emotional control</li> <li>• Poor social skills</li> <li>• Social isolation or detachment</li> <li>• Need for power</li> <li>• Need for control</li> <li>• Learning disability</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Serious personal illness</li> <li>• Mental health issues</li> <li>• Post traumatic stress</li> <li>• Culture shock</li> <li>• Drug or alcohol use</li> </ul>

*Cultural Factors Contributing to Aggression:*

**Aggressive Behaviour**



**Public display of emotion**



**Status**



Power Distance



4. Managing and Diffusing Student Aggression

DO...	DON'T...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Stay calm.</li> <li>✓ Be polite.</li> <li>✓ Maintain a confident, commanding presence.</li> <li>✓ Keep your personal safety and the safety of the staff and students paramount. Keep your distance. Use barriers. Mentally identify an escape route. Keep others out of harm's way.</li> <li>✓ Focus on the emotion being displayed, not the words being said.</li> <li>✓ Ask questions in order to find out which factors are causing the student aggression.</li> <li>✓ Relate to the student as a person. Separate the person from the behaviour.</li> <li>✓ Give the student clear choices about how to resolve the situation.</li> <li>✓ Exhibit empathy but not sympathy.</li> <li>✓ Use active listening: sounds to show you are listening, paraphrasing, clarifying.</li> <li>✓ Demonstrate that you understand the student's emotions: "You sound...", "It sounds like you are..."</li> <li>✓ Set limits: "I can help you if you calm down and tell me what you need."</li> <li>✓ Use silence to calm the situation down.</li> <li>✓ Report any behaviour that is violent or looks like it will turn to violence—either to security or the police.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Behave reactively.</li> <li>✗ Show fear or anger.</li> <li>✗ Respond to aggression with aggression.</li> <li>✗ Issue threats or use threatening non-verbal communication.</li> <li>✗ Make promises you can't keep.</li> <li>✗ Make false statements.</li> <li>✗ Explain technical, complicated information when emotions are high.</li> <li>✗ Take sides, disagree or assign blame.</li> <li>✗ Patronize.</li> <li>✗ Belittle or criticize the person or make them feel foolish.</li> <li>✗ Bargain, however you can negotiate.</li> <li>✗ Try to disarm someone who is armed. Call 9-1-1 or security.</li> </ul>

5. Preventing Student Aggression

Preventative Strategies
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have a written Code of Conduct which all students and staff agree to follow. Students sign the Code of Conduct on the first day of class or upon enrollment.</li> <li>2. Set clear expectations of student behaviour from the first class. Set clear boundaries of respect, both student-to-student and student-to-teacher.</li> </ol>

3. Directly discuss with students what aggression is and contrast this with assertiveness. Discuss cultural differences towards aggression.
4. Model assertive behaviour (rather than passive, passive-aggressive or aggressive behaviour) in class at all times.
5. Keep records of any aggressive student behaviour that is at an unacceptable level.
6. Train your fellow teachers to identify, understand and manage aggressive behaviour.
7. Take formal conflict resolution training.

### Putting it into Practice

The following scenarios are real-life examples of student aggression in the classroom. For each scenario below:

1. Decide which definitions of aggression are applicable.
2. Determine which factors you think might be contributing to or causing the aggression.
3. Think about how you would handle this situation as a teacher.

#### Scenario A

Student A is delivering an individual presentation to the class about his culture. Student A describes the music of his culture and then clicks on a link to play different music samples. Student B suddenly jumps up and interrupts the presentation of Student A. Student B shouts that he won't listen to the music because it is not from God. Student B demands that Student A stop the music and stop the presentation. Student A stands frozen, unsure of what to do. Student B continues to yell that the music Student A is playing is evil and he won't listen to it. After yelling and shouting for several more minutes, Student B storms out of the class.

#### Scenario B

Every class, Student A targets Student B with rude, derogatory, and insulting comments at every opportunity. The remarks were initially made in a soft voice so that you, the teacher, could not entirely catch what was being said. Student B did not tell you what Student A said. Now, however, the remarks are louder and louder, so that you can hear what Student A is saying. Student A now also laughs at Student B's mistakes with English. Finally, Student A encourages other students in the class to dislike Student B.

#### Scenario C

You hear loud shouting from the hallway. You see two female students facing each other in the hallway. Student A is jabbing at Student B with her finger. Student B keeps backing up to get some distance from Student A, but Student A keeps moving forwards. Student A is yelling at Student B accusing her of trying to steal her boyfriend. Student B is denying this, saying she doesn't even know who Student A's boyfriend is. Student A's yelling gets louder and louder.

#### Scenario D

Your students are writing a timed essay in class that will count for fifteen percent of their final grade. At one point, two students start whispering to each other. You tell them to stop or you will confiscate their essays and give them zero. They stop whispering. Another student then drops his book onto the floor accidentally. Another student in the class suddenly explodes, shouting, "Would everyone please shut up! How am I supposed to pass this essay when everyone is making so much noise! Just stop it!" The student continues to yell and swear for several more minutes.

**Scenario E**

You have two students in your class who are from countries that were previously on opposing sides of a lengthy and deadly armed conflict. On the first day of class, the two students stayed away from each other. You didn't realize anything was wrong until the third class when you asked the two students to be partners in an activity. They reluctantly sat next to each other and started the activity. Throughout the course of the activity their voices got louder and louder until they were shouting at each other. They were not speaking English so you did not know what the problem was. One student then punched the other and a physical fight started.

**Additional Resources**

Paterson, Randy J., PhD. 2000. The Assertiveness Workbook. New Harbinger Publications.

Wolfe, David A (Editor). 2007. Acting Out: Understanding and Reducing Aggressive Behaviour in Children and Youth. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

**Thanks for participating!**

[www.aceducation.ca](http://www.aceducation.ca)